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THE

WIND OF DESTINY

BY

ARTHUR SHERBURNE HARDY

AUTHOR OF "BUT YET A WOMAN"

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THE WIND OF DESTINY.

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They who believe that they can speak, or keep silence, in a word, act, in virtue of a free decision of the soul, dream with their eyes open. — SPINOZA.

I.

ALL the day long the corn had been yellowing in the summer's sun. The hills of Ashurst were barely visible through the haze; even the river seemed asleep.

Behind the house a path led along the low, rambling wall, overgrown with bushes; a fringe of sumach, among whose red fruit the clematis trailed in lines of smoke-like bloom. At the end of the path a few tall pines overtopped the bank, throwing long shadows upon the slender sedges and pale green grass that ventured out a little way from the shore. Checked by the curve at this point, the river rested here a moment, its wide expanse of luminous waters unbroken by a ripple. Only by gazing attentively could one see the farther shore, where a boat crept slowly along the shadow line, its oars flashing now and

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then in the sunlight, like the dripping wings of a water-fowl.

Under the pines a seat and table, covered by a lattice, constituted what Schonberg called his tea-house.

Schonberg himself stood upon the edge of the bank, his legs wide apart, his pipe in one hand, the other thrust to the elbow in the capacious pocket of a dressing-gown of faded yellow, which hung to his heels. A fringe of white hair struggled from under the rim of his black skull-cap, and over his bright gray eyes pushed heavy eyebrows which, with the strong lines of his face, gave him a grim aspect. But these lines were singularly mobile, especially about the mouth, and could soften with his thought, even to solicitude.

One who, attracted by this lonely figure on the bank of Ashurst's river, should go nearer to examine the face might discover in its grim expression a contempt for the casualties of life; for Schonberg prided himself upon an inner life, unaffected by the storms which beat about his personality. And there was, in truth, in his nature a solitary summit, lifted above mutation and tides. Speculation had busied itself about this man, the more so because of the solitude he carried with him. It is not necessary to have taken a city to excite curiosity, or to become worthy the

pen of the biographer. Biographer! One can almost see his eyes take fire at the word. For what is more presumptuous than to write the history of a man? Trace the red and the black drops to the veins of his ancestors, set his portrait over against the title-page, strand him in a universe of self-seekers, catalogue his tastes, describe his habits, hoard up the meagre incidents, — after all, the man escapes you, hid within that zone of infinite repulsion which surrounds the soul as it does the atom.

II.

Friendships are not always formed on the principle of the proverb, for certainly Schonberg and Fleming were not of a feather. Theirs had begun in their student days at Paris, — those days when ambition has not yet been harassed by the whip of necessity, and has not yet known defeat. For what matter those defeats of childhood when hope, not yet tired, reforms its vast projects and summons new armies?

The young American had first met his friend on the stairway of their attic chambers, where to Harold, who intimated that neighbors ought to be good company, Schonberg had replied that he did not improve upon acquaintance. His

dress alone might have attracted the attention of an artist; but it was so dominated by his personality that, when Harold attempted to reproduce it for the benefit of his comrades in the atelier of the Beaux Arts, he discovered he was drawing a man, and not a costume.

They often found themselves together on the *impériale* of the omnibus crossing the Pont St. Michel: Harold on the way to the Palais des Beaux Arts, Schonberg to the dingy lecture-room of the Sorbonne. The fact that they were both — the one in art, the other in philosophy — under the chiefs of the eclectic school furnished them a theme for conversation on their morning rides. In spite of Schonberg's discouraging reception of his offer of friendship, Harold, later on, abandoned his café for that of his new acquaintance, and they began to exchange visits in their attic quarters. This comradeship ripened slowly into friendship, — a friendship to whose formation each brought very different material.

Harold was an enthusiast, Schonberg a neutral, — intellectually, for the heart always takes sides. Harold went into raptures over his master, Schonberg called his a philosophical zero.

"You and I," he said one day, contemptuously, "are types of eclecticism. I shall perish like the donkey, between the trough and the manger, of starvation" —

"And I?" laughed Harold.

"You? You will take the best dish from every table, and die of gluttony."

Neither knew the value of money, and each betrayed his ignorance in his own fashion, — Harold by throwing it away, Schonberg by not knowing what to do with it.

If knowledge of life consists in that wide experience which weakens convictions, rather than in the deep which strengthens them, Harold knew more of it than Schonberg.

Whereas Harold made many friends and acquaintances, Schonberg made none. He was especially awkward and uncomfortable in the presence of women, always avoiding them if possible. He never alluded to them, however, except in terms of respect, — such respect as a planet might feel for a comet whose fiery trail and uncertain track it watches afar from its quiet orbit.

Harold had once succeeded in persuading his friend to accompany him to a house where he spent much of his time; but the visit was never repeated.

"He is very interesting," said Harold's fair hostess. "Why do you not bring him again?"

"What! he interests you who cannot interest him?"

"Precisely. That is the reason."

"Well, at all events he is safe," replied Harold.

"And you in danger!" she retorted, laughing. "Answer me this question. What is the chief end of man?"

"To love his neighbor," said Harold, bowing.

"Good! You have the catechism by heart. Love is the flower of human nature. For which plant, then, have you the most fear, — for this one," tapping his shoulder with her fan, "which has a hundred blossoms, or that other which has only one?"

The friendship existing between Schonberg and Harold did not prevent each from finding secret fault with the other for precisely those qualities which formed the hook and eye of their attachment.

In the former's rugged seriousness the latter found a needed sense of repose. Harold could lean against his friend as the atoms lean against each other, though he often struggled against this equilibrating force. For him, a setting sun meant nothing; there was another day coming. The falling leaves in the windy autumn woods, what were they? Spring returns again. For such a nature life is a continuous quantity, and the track of sorrow a furrow ploughed in the sea. The organization is full of elasticity, its wounds heal. If a flower falls from the stalk, it

puts forth another; if one object is withdrawn, another replaces it. This vitality often astonished Schonberg, though he knew it was never really assailed. To imperil life the dagger must get through the skin.

III.

During the summer following their acquaintance they made a walking-tour together through Flanders and the Forest of Ardennes. It was Schonberg who had proposed the excursion, but Harold who had determined its direction. They had traversed the mediæval cities of Flanders, crossed the Meuse at Namur, skirted the Forest of Ardennes, and, following the fall of the Lesse, had struck the river again at Dinant, — all this that Harold might steal an interview with a certain Madelon Foy, then living a league from Dinant, in the château of Walzins. Harold's romance was like many another, except as it happened to be set over against the sombre experience of his friend. Contrasted with this, it was like a spot of sunshine on the dark slope of a mountain.

Thrown upon his own resources by Harold's almost daily absence at Walzins, Schonberg gave himself up to a solitary exploration of the en-

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virons. Rowing down the river one afternoon with a stroke that resembled his lengthy stride, he saw the figure of a woman on the island just below the mouth of the Lesse. She had apparently expected him to stop, for as he passed by she raised a hand and beckoned to him. He turned the prow towards the bank, and, almost before it had parted the long grass which lined the shore, a young girl leaped on the thwart and pushed the boat into the current.

"Have you seen my skiff?" she asked, seating herself in the stern.

"No," said Schonberg, looking at her and beginning to row mechanically.

"Of course not, you come from above. It will be stopped at the lock."

She spoke with the Walloon accent, but her voice was pure and clear. She was evidently satisfied with the direction he was taking, for she sat quietly watching him as he rowed, leaning forward with one elbow on her knee, her chin in her hand. Suddenly she rose to her feet.

"Give me one oar," she said briefly, stretching out her arm.

She fitted the pin to its socket, and seating herself on the thwart in front of him began to row. For the first time Schonberg was free to look at her. He saw a coil of brown hair

drawn back so smoothly as to show the natural contour of the head, and a strong but slender back which swayed to and fro with an easy vigor. Though he had jostled many a woman in the street, Schonberg had never been so near to one before.

The swollen river which had carried away her boat was still rising, sweeping them down among its surface eddies. From time to time she turned her head to mark the drift, setting the bow to the course with a strong quick tug at the oar, which loosened the handkerchief knotted about her throat, and disclosed her neck browned by the sun, — the golden brown of Rembrandt. As they neared the town she steered in towards the landing, and, as the boat swung alongside the short flight of stone steps, leaped ashore. On the lower stair she turned, looking at him, as he fastened the rope to the iron ring, till their eyes met; then, with an abrupt "Adieu," ran up the steps, crossed the street, and disappeared under an archway.

Schonberg, after paying his ten sous, walked down the quay like a man coming out of a dream. He sought to take up his life where it had been interrupted by that figure beckoning to him on the island. He quickened his pace as if to escape the intruder; but ever before him he saw the golden-brown neck, the lithe form

swaying to and fro, and inhaled the faint perfume of her hair.

On reaching his room he found Harold, radiant. "I thought you would never return. Come, dinner! I am ravenous."

"What! A lover, and hungry?"

"Ravenous, I say," repeated Harold. "I have eaten nothing all day. Ah, my friend," he said, with the impulsive frankness natural to him, "what blessed wind of fate drove us hither!"

Schonberg said nothing.

"You found the river high," said Harold at dinner, relating the events of his day.

"Yes, high," replied Schonberg, absently.

"At the ford of the Lesse, even, it was over the stepping-stones. Can you imagine how we passed?"

"You wet your feet," said Schonberg.

"Yes, mine," laughed Harold.

"My dear fellow," Harold said that night as they went to bed, "you think I am mad, losing my wits. I tell you, study me well; I am worth it, for I am the happiest of men. It is for that reason I find you by contrast more sober than ever to-night."

Early the next morning Harold was off with a hunting-party in a neighboring preserve. Schonberg, whose brain sleep had cleared, had a

line of sarcasm about his mouth for the night before. Still the day hung heavily upon his hands, and when the shadow of Dinant's spire lay on the river he went down to the quay, and drove the little boat against the current, past the island to the meeting of the waters, floating back by the tall flags on the hurrying tide.

"A huntsman," said Harold that evening, cleaning his gun, "is a superstitious devil. I shot a bird the last time, — an old cock drumming on a log, — and to-day I went to the same spot, as if that were the only lucky one in the wood."

The following day the boatman, with an eye to his ten sous, was on hand, but not his customer. For when the hour came, Schonberg, with his book, climbed the steps zigzagging up the face of the rock to the ruined citadel. On the way back the open door of the church at the foot of the stairs invited him, and he went in under the blackened portal, taking one of the wooden chairs near the entrance. A few straggling worshipers were kneeling here and there on the cold stones; a boy was extinguishing the lights on the high altar; a priest came down the aisle, crossed himself at the font, and passed out into the street.

As he was about to go, a figure he knew stood in the doorway, the outer sunlight on her hair.

She recognized him, her face lighting up with a smile, and came straight towards him.

"You row no more?" she said, her short woolen dress touching his knee.

He did not look up at first. When he did, the smile was gone out on her face, the same searching expression he had seen from the boat filling her eyes. But in the instant that his met them they changed, more and more, — it was only an instant, yet how long! — till they seemed to say "Come!" in a soft, compelling whisper. Then she went on, between the pillars of the nave, to a side altar in the transept. He could see her from where he sat, and his eyes wandered confusedly from her kneeling form to the image on the shrine, whose tinsel robes caught the glimmer of the candles.

The fable of Love's bandaged eyes is spared by the myth-wreckers. How else explain his random arrows, those careless but unerring arrows? How tremblingly would he fit them to the string if he could see the graybeards sitting by in council — Experience that analyzes, Prudence that weighs, and the cold eye of Reason that puts to shame.

Schonberg rose and walked to the door. The street was full of people, and he followed the throng irresolutely; then turned and reëntered the church. The wooden image was there, with

its vacant eyes and tinsel robe, but the kneeling figure had gone.

"If we stay here much longer," said Harold that evening, "we cannot go to Trèves."

"Well, then, let us remain where we are."

"Yes; but for you it will be stupid. You stay only to please me."

"If you do not wish my opinion, why ask it?" said Schonberg. "I am not an echo."

His proposition was an agreeable one to Harold, though unexpected. At all events, Harold was satisfied. He was writing to his fair hostess at Paris, a woman all of whose friends were suitors, her husband most of all.

"I am writing Madame X.," said he, looking up from the table. "Would you tell her she has a rival?"

"No," replied Schonberg.

"Why not?"

"You may change your mind."

"My dear fellow, the mind is not in question in such matters. Wait, some day you will see for yourself."

He was going to Walzins the next day.

"Come, let us go to bed," he said, laying down his pen. "I am sleepy."

"You have not finished your letter?"

"No, and I am not sleepy," he laughed; "but to a man who waits for to-morrow, sleep

is a famous time-slayer. I was writing only to kill time, and since you forbid me to write of the sole thing I have to tell, I naturally can think of nothing to say."

"You might tell how you kill time," said Schonberg, preparing to go to bed.

"Poor fellow!" thought Harold, as he went to his room; "he has no to-morrow." No to-morrow! when in the border land of sleep dark eyes were saying, "Come!" and his hands already grasped the oars.

When the chimes under the bulbous spire of the tower jangled their four o'clock carillon on that morrow for which Harold could not wait, Schonberg was in his boat breasting the current. He was no sophist. The morning had seen alternating moods, but when finally he strode down the quay under the lime-trees, it was after admitting that he went because he wished to.

Past the bare limestone cliffs he crept, inch by inch, till he gained the still water behind the island; then he rested on his oars and looked about him. Nothing. He pulled in under the island shore, rowing along the bank till it unmasked the bridge at the mouth of the Lesse. He was about to turn when a boat shot out from under the trees at Anseremne. He caught it with half a hundred quick strokes, and they rowed on together, she slightly in advance, with-

out a word. As they neared the bridge he slackened his speed.

"Row! hard!" she cried to him, with a challenge in her voice; "it gallops here."

He fell behind, and she passed first under the black arch, keeping her lead with a laugh whose echo came back to him from the narrowing cliffs. Abandoning a generosity out of place, Schonberg took up the challenge, putting all his strength in the blades. But his companion had stopped, and, before he saw where he was, he felt the keel grate on the shallowing bottom, and was hard aground.

"This is the end," she called to him; "we can go no farther. Wait."

She had seen his situation and was coming to his aid. His boat was fast at the centre, dipping bow and stern in deeper water as he moved from one to the other in the effort to get clear.

"Wait!" she said, "you are caught on a rock. Now," and she reached over, taking hold of the stern, "get in with me."

Lightened of its load, the boat floated, and pushing it alongside she fastened its chain to the ring at the stern of her own, and sat down.

"Captured!" she said.

"No, quits," said Schonberg. "One good turn deserves another."

Her face was flushed with the long effort, and

the handkerchief on her bosom rose and fell to her deep breathing.

"It 's beautiful here, is n't it?" she said, loosening the folds from about her throat, and dipping her hand into the water. "Is that what you came here for?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said he.

"Is n't it so where you came from?" she asked, looking at him.

"It is different," said Schonberg.

"Is there a river?"

"Yes."

"That 's where you learned to row," she said, with a sidelong glance.

"No, I don't row there."

"Don't you?" she said, with a look of surprise.

For want of something to say, Schonberg described the Seine.

"I should like to see it," she replied, splashing the water with her hand.

"This is best. You would say so if you were there."

"This is my prison, and that is yours," she replied shortly. "What do you do there?"

"Study," said Schonberg, a little ashamed of his occupation.

She looked at him again, curiously; then, after a pause, "Did you ever see Freyr?"

"No; where is it?"

"I'll show you." She reached back, and took an oar from the boat in tow. "You row, and I'll steer," she said.

She guided the boats to the shore, and helped him to secure them, laughing at his bungling knot, and finally tying it over again herself.

"Come," she said, leading the way.

He followed her up the face of the cliff, from whose summit the château of Freyr appeared on the plain below, its yellow walls hidden among green hedges, and all about it meadows dotted with grazing sheep.

"I suppose there are finer châteaux in Paris," she said, looking down on Freyr, and fastening a red heather spray in the knot of her handkerchief.

"Yes, certainly. But people are not any happier there than here, for that reason."

"How do you know?" she asked quickly. And then, lowering her voice, "That's what Father Pierre says."

"And that's what the sheep say down there on the meadow," said Schonberg, standing by her side.

"It's not what the lark says when he rises at morn," she replied.

"What would you do if you should go?" he asked, not knowing why.

"I would go, — that's something. Why do you come here? Because you are free. Come," she said abruptly, "look at the sun." It lay on the edge of the hills as they went down the path into the valley.

Her animation returned when they were in the boats again, and she led the way down the stream, flinging a smile over the water between them whenever he turned. Under the reverberating arch of the bridge she whispered "Adieu!" and threw the red heather into his boat; while hers, caught by the rush of the Meuse, shot like an arrow in towards Anseremne.

IV.

For days after, Schonberg lost all trace of her. He wandered restlessly about the church; he passed the archway under which he had first seen her disappear, with a thrill of expectation; but neither there, nor on the river, nor at Anseremne, did he meet with her again.

One morning he opened the door of his lodging directly upon her, but, though she saw him, she went on without a sign. He was, however, in a frame of mind to which obstacles are like the sparks of a fuse. He watched her till she was fairly on the road which wound under the

hills along the edge of the river, then ran to the water-side and leaped into his boat. He made a sign to the boatman, in his doorway across the street, and headed up the stream. Half-way to Anseremne, where the rocks crowd the road to the bank, he caught up with her. She was sitting quietly on one of the guard-stones watching his approach, and as the boat grated against the slope of the wall she stepped on the bow. To reach the seat in the stern she had to pass the thwart where he sat, and as she did so he put out his hand to detain her.

"Why, just now, did you" —

"Sh!" she said, with a smile, "am I not here?"

Yes, she was there, sitting opposite him with the smile still in her eyes, — that was enough. He was about to speak, but she raised her finger to her lips, — she had so much to tell! There was to be a fair at Dinant to-morrow. Actors were coming from Bruxelles. Had he ever seen a fair? There would be booths in the square, and tents full of strange sights, and music.

What did he care for the fair, for the mimic stage where the puppets strut! Like the rush of a river the rush of his blood drowned the sense of her words, but their music filled his ears. He listened, but he did not hear.

"Row," she said; for he made no haste to reach Anseremne. She took the rudder ropes, talking the while; steering west of the island, thus hiding the hamlet on the eastern shore, and heading the boat for the mouth of the Lesse. All the people for leagues around would be there, — oh, a great crowd! And children to ride on the turning horses. The gateaux makers of Dinant would coin money that day. And the actors, — *Oh! veine* — She had never seen the actors; they did not come every year.

She had brought the boat to the bank near the bridge.

"And you will be there?" he asked.

"No," she said, standing up and looking down upon him, "I shall not be there." His face clouded, but hers was radiant. Had she not realms to give away? "Look, do you see, near the top of the hill, that chapel among the trees? I will be there. If the door is shut, knock, and call 'Noël.' Sit still!" she cried, "you will have us over. Give me your hand."

The boat swung in the eddy; she steadied herself with his hand, and, watching her chance, sprang ashore.

"Noël, Noël!" he cried, as she ran up the bank, "you will not deceive me?"

She turned and looked at him. All the light had gone from her face.

"Deceive you?" she repeated slowly. "Perhaps so, — who knows? You had best not come."

He would have followed her, but the branch he held had broken when she leaped, and the current under the arch had swept him already into the mid-stream.

The chapel stood on the hill behind the village, in the angle of the cemetery wall, of which it formed a part. Without, it presented that appearance of age which comes to buildings as to men, when time has destroyed their beauty but has not yet sapped their strength. In the band under the windows might be seen the trace of a sculptured vine whose buds and leaves had long since fallen; and here and there under the eaves a headless gargoyle projected from the shadow. The stones of its dark walls still held firmly, but the place of their carven ornaments was known only by scars.

Schonberg approached the main entrance and knocked. The echoes answered within, and without the scream of frightened birds. He waited; then, laying his lips to the oak door, he called, "Noël!" Still no answer. Only the twitter of the swallows among the vacant niches above, where a single figure remained, over whose head the birds had built their nests in a crown of thorns.

It was evident that no one had passed that door for many a day, and he followed along the wall in search of another on the side of the cemetery. A narrow gateway led into the inclosure, among whose leaning stones and iron crosses he made his way. Some of these were newly gilt and hung with artificial garlands; others, defaced with moss and rust, were nearly hidden in the tall grass through which the perennial flowers found their way to the sun, and stood whispering together at the sight of their ghostly brethren, stained and disordered by the rain and wind.

As he had conjectured, there was on this side another entrance. It was encumbered with refuse, old boxes, and garden tools; and half buried in the rubbish the face of a broken statue stared from its deep-cut, hollow eyes, still instinct with life. He hesitated a moment, then went in. At the foot of the steps, beyond the line the sunlight could not pass, he saw Noël. She was evidently waiting for him, for she beckoned with a nervous gesture, and led the way through the débris which strewed the floor.

At one of these obstacles, following close behind her, he threw his arms about her, and caught the quick, deep breath of surprise on her lips. She did not struggle, but a shudder ran through her frame; then, for one brief moment

she stood still. Was it a dream? "Noël," he murmured. It was not in the lecture-room of the Sorbonne that he had learned what to say.

But at the sound of his voice she unclasped his arms, and, still holding one hand in hers, led him on. At the foot of the winding stair leading up to the pulpit she made him sit down, and, crossing the aisle, pushed wide open one of the windows through whose dust-covered glass the sun could not penetrate. A flood of yellow light leaped in, and fell on the pavement at his feet. Even at that moment he noticed the two rude outlines on the stone floor, — a man and a woman, side by side, with their hands folded over their breasts.

"Let us talk together," she said, sitting down by his side. "Tell me, what do you do in Paris?"

She had asked that question before.

"I study," said he.

"Is that all?"

"All."

"And what do you study about?" Schonberg had no answer at hand. "Perhaps I should not understand," she added.

"I study philosophy, — but that is only a name."

"What does it teach you?"

"How to be happy, they say."

"Happier than now?"

He made a quick movement toward her, but she checked him with her eyes.

"Why do you ask, who know?" he said.

"You thought I would go to the fair;" then, looking away, "I wanted to make you happier than that."

He fell on his knees at her feet, and clasped his hands round her waist.

"What do you think?" he cried, drawing her face down towards his.

She neither resisted nor answered him.

"But if one is not happy, does philosophy teach one how to bear pain?" she asked.

"Oh, Noël, Noël, what shall henceforth give you pain?"

"Nothing. But you?"

"I?" He laughed aloud.

"Hush!" She put her hand over his mouth, and bending down of her own accord, "Come what may, you are happy now. Will you remember?"

"Noël,"— how sweet the word was! — "Noël, you have something to tell me; something on your mind."

"No — I" — She checked herself suddenly, with an effort to smile.

"Is it because I am here?" and he stood up. "Tell me, — say the word, and I will go."

She sprang to his neck. "No, no! not yet, not yet!" she cried, sobbing like a child. It filled him only with joy then, but there came a day when he would have given all but that joy itself to forget that sob on his breast.

He lifted her gently, and was about to place her on the seat they had occupied. He had not noticed it before, — it was the wooden frame of the grave-digger, and leaning against the pulpit stairs was the spade. He looked about him. There was no other seat. The whole interior was littered with rubbish, barrels piled against the pillars, heaps of hay and straw in the nave. Along the side aisles, draped in dust and cobwebs, were ranged the stalls; but only their mouldering arms and backs remained. On a low platform, at the end of the nave, was the remnant of a wooden altar which a touch would have overthrown; and above it a black cross, from whose arms the dying Christ looked down. For a moment the tragic irony of that rude figure, in the midst of this desolation and decay, made him forget the burden in his arms. As he started down the nave towards the platform under the cross, she opened her eyes. He shut them down with kisses.

"Come!" she suddenly exclaimed, like one waking from sleep to danger, "the day is ours, and it will be gone. Shall we take our boat

and go up the river? I know places that you have not seen. And we will dine there, — oh, I have it all ready. Shut the window while I am gone." And, slipping from his arms, she ran down the aisle and out the door.

Schonberg closed the window, shutting out the sun. He found his way with difficulty in the dim light, and at the door turned back with the lingering look of one who leaves a spot beloved. The stalls, like a row of monks sitting in the shadow of the wall, seemed to watch about the Christ, whose outlines were just visible in the gloom.

Even the grasses without, bathed in warm sunshine, were a grateful sight; and still more the small house, with its out-buildings and domed ricks of hay that he saw from the gate; and above all, Noël, coming down the path.

She gave him the basket on her arm. "I will go for the boat," she said. "Take the lane by those birches, and meet me at the bridge."

There are times when the clouds of sense which hang about this mysterious life roll away, and everything is plain. How we wonder, when the revelation is finished and the soul gropes again for a foothold! Surely we were mad that day.

Schonberg had no need to record it in his journal. The breath of the summer woods, the

light of the summer sky, the voice and the eye of love, — all were written down. Ay! and that fleeting presage which troubles the heart when it is full. Poverty is not so poor as that happiness which has before it the unseen certainty of collapse. But he knew it then. There was a warning in her happiest smile, in the quick alternation of her moods. For him the wealth of that day was inexhaustible; but she counted it as the miser counts his gold. Once she left him and wandered away by herself; once she crept into his arms; and both times, to his question, "What is it, Noël?" she answered, "Nothing. I love you."

As the day waned she grew more restless.

"Noël," he said, "if you do not trust me, you do not love me."

From that time on, no word or look of trouble betrayed her.

It was late when they came back. The stars in the river danced and sparkled in the ripple of the boat. She had one oar, and sat before him as on the first day. At the bridge they ceased rowing, and the boat floated noiselessly under the arch. She leaned back, till he saw her upturned face, and felt the touch of her form. One last kiss, — oh, if he had known! As they emerged from the shadow, she rose to her feet. It was as if she had said, "The day is over, — it

is finished." She pointed to the shore, and he rowed into the spot where he had left her once before. When the boat touched the bank she stepped out silently, and began to climb the slope to the road.

"Noël," he cried, "to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow," she answered.

"Here?"

"Yes, here."

"But, Noël, when?"

The question startled her like a rifle shot. He could not see her face, only that she had stopped and turned.

"When?" Her voice was hoarse, and trembled. "At this time."

Something told him that he should not see that form, hurrying away in the night, again. He leaped from the thwart, letting his boat go adrift, and ran up the slope. "Noël! Noël!" He ran down the road. "Noël! Noël!" She must have gone the other way. He turned and ran again. "Noël! Noël!" But the night was dark. Great clouds were advancing over the hills. A peal of thunder broke against the cliffs of the river, the flash lighting up the road and bridge. No one was in sight. "Noel! Noel!" No one answered, no one heard, — not even the Christ that loomed majestic above the desolate shrine.

V.

He knew what the knot of women under his window were talking of the next morning, their stolid faces lighted by the fire of curiosity; for why did people stop each other in the street, exchanging low words and exclamations of surprise? As he hurried by, the venders of fruit and spiced cakes were arranging their wares in the booths of the fair.

"What do you say?" cried one, screaming to her neighbor across the way.

"A girl has drowned herself in the river above."

The answer rang in his ears. Every rock and tree repeated it as he went by. The river tossed it back from its waves, and the wind told it to the quivering grass. At Anseremne quarry workmen were pushing the loaded cars to the barges; women were washing on the river bank. What! and Noël dead? He hurried on through the wide river street, up the narrow lane. There he met a priest coming down.

"Where is Father Pierre?"

The name came back to him, though he had not heard it since he looked with Noël on Freyr.

"I am Father Pierre. What is it, my son?"

"Where is she?"

Father Pierre had looked into too many faces not to read this one.

"Come," he said, retracing his steps. They climbed the hill in silence, passing between the graves to the chapel door. A single candle burned on the altar within, beside a white form stretched below, seeming itself the source of the light which it reflected upward on the protecting arms of the cross.

An old woman, bent over with age, rose from the steps as they went down.

"Leave us," said the priest. Then to Schonberg, "Is your conscience free?" The blank stare of the eyes into which he looked was answer enough. "Enter, then," he said. "I will wait here."

When Schonberg came out again his face was as white as the robe of the dead. "Why" — his voice ended in a gasp.

"Last night," said Father Pierre, drawing a paper from his soutane and handing it to Schonberg, "she sent me this."

He took it and read: —

"I shall be found at the bridge. Cover my face, and lay me in the chapel under the black cross. Some one will come. Make them let him go in, and give him this."

There was a folded paper within. As he

opened it he saw the white violets they had gathered together, — faded, but their scent made his brain reel.

"Remember all you have said. Forgive the past for the sake of to-day. For what I do there is nothing to forgive; it is the only way I can be forever yours."

"What does it mean?" he said, holding it out to Father Pierre.

A smile of satisfaction lit up the priest's face as he read. "Come with me," he replied, leading the way. At the farther angle of the wall he paused before a little mound scarce two feet long, remote from the rest, but carefully kept from the weeds. "Stoop and read," he said.

Mechanically Schonberg did as he was bidden. There was a single word on the plain wooden cross at the head of the grave: Noël.

"It is the old story," said the priest. "But she has sprinkled herself with the blood of sacrifice. Let God, who made the falcon, judge the dove."

Yes, as Father Pierre said, all the stories are the same. In the laboratory of life each newcomer repeats the old experiments, and laughs and weeps for himself. We will be explorers, though all the highways have their signboards and every by-path is mapped. Helen of Troy will not deter us, nor the wounds of Cæsar

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frighten, nor the voice of the king, crying, Vanity! from his throne, dismay. What wonder the stars that once sang for joy are dumb, and the constellations go down in silence?

VI.

To Schonberg, who disappeared suddenly from Dinant, Harold wrote forthwith: —

"You cannot surprise me. I predicted your desertion, and condoned it in advance. I see you now in your den among the chimney-pots, pitying those who part with their reason. Take care! one may reason irrationally."

But when Harold returned to Paris, Schonberg had disappeared, nor did he hear from him till the eve of his marriage, when the last letter which came for Madelon Foy brought a band of curious plates for the hair, — beaten gold set with topaz, — whose date and maker no jeweler of the Rue de la Paix could determine.

An irregular correspondence followed, in which, as in their former intercourse, Harold's part was the more active one; but it was long before they met again. After a year's tour from Norway to Algiers, with Madelon, Harold had returned to France to pass the summer at St. Malo, before setting sail for Ashurst. From here he wrote

Schonberg — Madelon herself added a postscript — entreating a visit; and when Schonberg came, and had grasped Harold's hand and looked into Madelon's winsome face, there climbed upon his knee a little girl, whose clinging arms were like the tendrils of the vine which fasten in the crevices of the rock.

He found Harold unchanged; hard pushed as ever for money, but not for cheer. Sometimes this cheer exasperated Schonberg; sometimes he even admired it, but without envy. For of all those things which grief envies, buoyancy is not one.

Harold had talked about his friend all these years, yet could not answer one of Madelon's questions. Now she knew why. This friend had no confidences to give, made no allusions to himself. He liked to be in her presence, though he said little, basking there as in the sun. Before the summer was over, scarcely knowing why, she was deeply attached to him. Little Seraphine preferred his company to that of all others, not excepting Madelon. She drew him down at morning on the sands, and listened at night with great wondering eyes to such stories as were not written in her books.

"There was once," Madelon heard him tell, in the twilight hour when Seraphine sat on his knee, "there was once a fair country built about

with a wall, over which none of its inhabitants could see, and behind which the stars went down. Some spent all their time in digging at this wall with their nails; others lay down beside the fountains in the shade, and laughed; and some, like spiders, spun webs to hide the stars whose perpetual silence troubled them. But that which troubled them most was a black bat none could escape; the idlers laughing at the fountains, nor the workers at the wall. Upon the youngest child, as upon the wisest philosopher who knew whether the number of the stars was odd or even, this ugly bat lighted; and such an one straightway disappeared and was seen no more. The wise men pretended that such had but gone beyond the wall, and this was the more probable because they were no longer anywhere to be seen. And some, who had climbed the highest mountains, said there were pleasant fields and brooks without, — only more beautiful, — and that the bat, like themselves, was a prisoner within the wall, and could not trouble those without.

"Now among these people abode also one who was ever with them, like the bat. The bat they named Death, and this other they called Love. None could avoid her, and none knew whence she came. She was more subtle than the bat, and wore many disguises, sitting down with the peasant in his hut and the king in his council-

chamber. Even the wise men were charmed by her, coming out from their retreats to converse with her, and the workers at the wall ceased their labor at the sound of her voice. But some said she was even more terrible than the bat; for, said they, she brings secretly its food, and but for her it would perish and peace reign. But most welcomed her; for under her robe hid always a laughing child whose name was Happiness, whom every man ran after to hold and keep for his own, but whom none could win or force to stay with them, — only Love.

"Now certain of the wise men pretended that none had ever seen Love, but that she was as it were a dream; and that the child that hid in her robe was only an image which existed on the retina of the eye. And this was the more probable, since none had persuaded the child to live with them, nor could any man be found who had seen it, except under the shelter of Love's robe. But others of the wise men made charms wherewith to snare the child, and to these charms they gave mighty names: to one Fame, and to another Labor; to one Reason, and to another Renunciation" —

"I do not understand," said Seraphine, with wide-open eyes.

"So?" said Schonberg; "then I will tell you about the giants that lived before the flood."

The summer passed quickly, and, as the time for farewells drew near, Madelon's face grew sad, — not alone because she looked forward with some misgivings to Ashurst. Her marriage had been bitterly opposed by her father, and but for her mother — who in becoming one had not wholly ceased to be a child — would probably never have taken place. The Countess Foy knew that the will and the heart of her daughter were in league, and that to break the one was also to break the other. Her husband, more skeptical, remained obdurate. As often, the same premise served for both arguments. She would yield because Madelon was their only child, a fact which to his way of thinking conveyed the right of despotism. The controlling motive, however, which led her at last openly to take Madelon's side was a self-reverence which forbade her violating the deeper instincts of her daughter's heart, as it would have prevented her from wronging her own. The Countess Foy respected herself first, her position afterwards. The marriage took place quietly at Walzins, with the express understanding on the part of the Count that thereafter Madelon's name was never to be mentioned in his presence. This conditional consent afforded him more pleasure than was ever suspected, for from that day to his death he wore a black band and black gloves,

the vanity of his effusive nature thus finding a most agreeable field for activity. There are men for whom tears and embraces are uninteresting, but to whom the temptation of playing the martyr is irresistible.

Madelon was more willing to pay the price of her happiness than her mother was to have her. For although the latter approved, her heart sometimes misgave her. "*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu*, advise me," she said, appealing to a friend who was then visiting her at Walzins.

"My dear, you might as well ask me which balloon to buy for your child of the man on the Champs Elysées; rank, riches, love, — it makes no difference. One bubble lasts as long as the other."

"Isabel!" exclaimed the Countess through her tears.

"Patience! if the bubble is nothing, it is we who hold the string. Tell your gosling to idealize: by dint of idealizing night and day even friendships continue; it is the infallible elixir" —

"You do not follow your own advice," interrupted the Countess resentfully.

"I? never!" laughed Isabel. "I weep bitterly the dead, but I detest mummies."

"You think I bring you the sanction of your happiness," said Madelon's mother in announ-

cing the conditions of her husband, "but it seems to me I only give you the right to destroy it." Secretly, she trusted to the influences of time and her own persuasions; but the only concession ever gained was after Seraphine's birth, when, being ordered to Walzins by the physicians to pass the summer on account of her health, she had succeeded in obtaining her husband's consent to a visit of Madelon with Seraphine. It was during the following winter, while Madelon was in Algiers, that the Countess died. One of Seraphine's earliest recollections was that of being caught in her mother's arms and kissed in a passion of tears. Then for the first time the child realized that in her world of sun and flowers was lurking somewhere a mysterious peril.

Schonberg came into the house at St. Malo a guest, and Madelon was a charming hostess. But it was not long before she found herself the guest, and he her entertainer. One by one she discarded those "undermost garments of dissimulation and courtesy which are never put off." Here was a man not to be lassoed with cobwebs; *of* him she knew nothing, but him she knew.

One evening, at bedtime, Seraphine learned that his stories were to come to an end. "You shall go with me!" she exclaimed, her voice quivering with the passion of alarm and desire.

"The child loves you," said Madelon, holding her breath.

"Well, — be it so," replied Schonberg; and this answer did not surprise her. For she had seen that unconscious influence of the child, drifting in like a buoy upon a stormy sea to save a sinking faith and courage.

That night she covered little Seraphine with kisses.

VII.

Harold Fleming had been one of Ashurst's failures.

According to its theory of life, nothing could be strung on the raveling yarn of existence until its ends had first been secured by a sort of theological hard knot, no matter what bright-colored beads this knot might thereafter uphold. The son of a former village pastor, he had been destined for his father's calling. But the years of study abroad, which were to have put the finicals on his education, disturbed its foundation courses. He had left Germany for Italy, and Italy for Paris, where he had flung himself into the study of art with the sudden enthusiasm of one who finds at last his calling, really beginning life in earnest only when he entered the studio of a French master. This act of seriousness was not, however, so interpreted in Ashurst, which saw the skeleton in everything. For

though its literary circle was very devoted to the "Old Masters," who had become great by sticking fast to their painting, Harold, in doing no more, became only a warning where they had become models. Even his fame, shared in later years by Ashurst, scarcely atoned for this lapse from virtue.

Moreover, having married, while abroad, a French lady, he very naturally brought her home with him. Not that Ashurst had an antipathy to all that was foreign. On the contrary, it shared that taste for foreign garniture which, like other similar waves, flowed and ebbed about its ancient landmarks without producing much more effect than the tide does on a hard beach. But it was one thing to import Philistine ornaments and apparel, and quite another to import the Philistine herself.

Madelon both disappointed the preconceived ideas and provoked the criticism of Ashurst. She dressed better than her neighbors, yet cared less about it. Except of life, she possessed less knowledge than they, yet wielded more power. She was, it is true, very fond of amusement, but of that kind which consists preëminently in the diversion of others, and this brilliant accomplishment was a more refined type of selfishness than had been expected. Of beauty she had little. In comparison with social powers such as hers,

beauty is but a passive force that waits, like inertia, on fortune. And with all this she had the rare gift, peculiarly her countrywomen's, of being at home what she was abroad, — an enkindling, energizing power. She exercised at her fireside that woman's stimulus which in its perverted form tempts men to overstep the boundaries of duty, as an elevating, restraining influence to keep them up to and within its requirements. Her home was not far from the ideal one. There were others also in Ashurst, and all true homes are everywhere essentially alike. But the style and circumstance of Madelon's appealed to the imagination as well as to the heart; its virtues possessed charms and graces. From various sources Ashurst had formed a type of feminine France to which Madelon did not conform. For she made cages instead of snares.

As for Schonberg, he felt in Ashurst as if he had stepped from a crowded street into some quiet old china shop, where he could neither sit down nor stir without destroying some image. For Ashurst was not tolerant of habits or judgments foreign to its own. It was not only that Schonberg was of an alien race, with those characteristic ways which belong to the decorative effect of national life, though these also were innocently resented as a slavery to gods not worshiped in Ashurst. Such external non-con-

formity to its canons might, however, escape with pity or be condoned with a smile. The real ground of disapproval was his steady neutrality in the face of all those mysteries of life for which Ashurst had a solvent, — a neutrality giving rise to the desire to see him subdued, brought to terms, and reduced to the common level. Combativeness, or aggression, would not have produced half the irritation of this silent but deep non-conformity, holding standards in such absolute indifference that they lost even the indirect tribute usually paid by their violators. People in Ashurst moved in orbits calculated before they were born. But for Schonberg all their usages and precedents, their formulæ and conventions, were only the wall which the wise men built about the tree on which the nightingale sang.

Those to whom appearances stand for realities never knew him, except as it were by sight; they saw his eccentricities alone, distinguishing him thereby from his fellows as one might distinguish the Torso from among statues, by the absence of head and limbs. Most followed blindly the verdicts of the oracles; for places like Ashurst have their oracles, and there are everywhere minds which place verdicts before reasons.

In this north wind of disapproval there grew

gradually over his speech and manners a roughness, like the fungus on his fence, — a roughness originally nothing but a straightforward honesty of purpose which stood modestly, though stoutly, for its own. But Ashurst was aggressive, and twisted a native virtue into almost a deformity. He made his enemies as do most men, by his tongue. This was more often due to a certain philosophic candor of speech than to any bitterness of spirit, — sheer absent-mindedness, one thought preoccupying his attention to the exclusion of all others; as when he interrupted the minister, who was repeating for his benefit a sermon on the gravity of trifles, with the remark that he disagreed with him entirely, for life, to him, was like the sphere, — the more any portion of it was magnified the flatter it seemed.

VIII.

It was not unnatural that speculation should busy itself about such as Schonberg. "Of mighty men and of great rivers the springs are obscure." He had the appearance of a wreck abandoned on a lonely shore. There were even those who were confident that he had suffered from a disappointment in love, — a conjecture which so amused Harold that he told his wife of it.

"I think so, too," replied Madelon demurely.

"You would n't think so if you had heard what he said when I told him."

"What did he say?"

"That love slew its victims by surfeit, not by starvation."

"That was an evasion," replied Madelon, so seriously that Harold looked up at her inquiringly. "Besides," she added quickly, "you are a living proof to the contrary."

"You don't really believe — nonsense!" he said, with a return of incredulity.

Had Madelon wished to disarm suspicion, she should have argued the matter. Her silence re-awakened curiosity.

"Come," he said after a pause, "you know something."

"No," replied she, hesitatingly.

"That was what you said when I first asked you if you loved me, but it proved otherwise."

"You are laughing at me," said Madelon, giving him a covert reproof with her eyes.

"I did n't then," replied Harold.

A longer pause followed, during which his eyes were fixed upon his wife. Madelon was silent. It is often hard to give specific reasons, though our intuitions are right.

"Nobody knows him better than I do," said Harold. "As for love!" and he laughed.

"He loves Seraphine," interrupted Madelon.

"Of course he loves Seraphine! Have you no other reasons?"

"You would call them trifles, Harold," said Madelon, laying down her work.

"Tell me one, and see. Come."

"Did you ever notice the little square of wood-violets in his garden,— how carefully he keeps them?" she said at last.

"No; but what of it?"

"Don't you think there is a kind of care we give to trifles which they themselves cannot explain?"

"Well?" said Harold.

"Unless they stand for something, — unless they are bound fast to memories" — and Madelon's voice, which trembled easily, faltered.

"Madelon," said Harold emphatically, "did you ever hear of that bridge into the Mohammedan paradise, narrow as the edge of a scimitar? I think you reach great conclusions by a terribly thin logic. If a man has violets in his garden, it is because he loves violets, not because" —

"That depends," interrupted Madelon.

"Yes, of course. But you put your conclusions for your premises. A man who has loved may love violets, but it hardly follows that because he likes violets" —

"I don't say it depends upon whether he loved, but upon whether he won," Madelon interrupted again. "If he had won, the violets would have been forgotten soon enough."

Between the truth and the inconsequence of this reply Harold was silent. But when he next saw Schonberg in his garden, he said, interrogatively, "You are fond of violets?"

"Why not?" replied Schonberg. "They are not cabbages. It is one thing to dig in one's garden for pleasure, and another to dig there for bread."

IX.

The net of circumstance which closed about Schonberg after his arrival in Ashurst was woven of a few simple strands. How few, indeed, the events of life, however complex or mutable! How common, and yet how momentous to the individual! History only repeats them, romance can but vary their order.

He had taken a vacant house near the Flemings, at which both Harold and Madelon had protested without avail. But most of his time he spent with them; for while he loved independence he did not mistake solitude for it, and had none of that shallow vanity which affects a disdain for common intercourse as a

proof of superiority. Thus he was no recluse. He had his strong social likes and dislikes, and trod pavements as well as wood-paths. He seemed to win without effort the love and esteem of simple folk and children, but for the minister he was ever the stone at the bottom of the eddy which the eddy cannot lift. For the minister was fond of logical tournaments, whereas Schonberg detested argument, thereby exercising an irresistible fascination for one whose sense of duty outran the respect due his own limitations, and whose knowledge of impotence begat an uneasy activity. On such occasions as he could not avoid, Schonberg usually capitulated, by that most exasperating of all surrenders, silence. Once only, driven to the wall, he lost his patience.

"When I see two men arguing," he said, turning on his heel, "I see two donkeys in a treadmill, moving side by side, and making no progress. Write it out for me, and I will go home and think about it. Digestion is a solitary business."

Little Seraphine had now a sister, with whom she affected the airs of a young mother. "You cannot love me so much now," Schonberg said to her one day; "Elize must have her share." These words, understood in all seriousness, set the little mind a-thinking, and when bedtime

came, and she had sought him out on the piazza for a good-night kiss, she asked, "Does the sky of St. Malo touch the sky of Ashurst?"

"Yes," said Schonberg.

"That 's how much I love you," she replied solemnly.

Those years of Elize's and Seraphine's childhood held for Schonberg a happiness akin to that of the mother who, pressing her loved ones to her bosom, sees reluctantly the days of dependence going by. They contained no events worthy of record, yet one having access to the pages of the journal which he filled with the splutterings of his quill pen would have found witnesses to the influences which filled those happy, monotonous years, — influences of the child who leads us back to the beginning of things: back to the springs of life whose only shadows are the flowers on their banks, whose only reflection is the upper sky; to the primal streams of hope and love, not yet swollen to those mighty currents that bear us away on their tide; to the days when we did not ask whither they tended, and had not forgotten whence they came; to the simple happiness of the child over whose pathway has not yet fallen the shadows of those spectral shapes, the Future and the Past. There is no child who is not wiser than you. All the long-forgotten first les-

sons are on his tongue. He will disconcert you over the Pythagorean proposition, though you have since mastered the Pythagorean philosophy. Of second, third, last impressions he knows nothing; he will give you the first. And woe to him whose ear has grown too tired to hear, whose life has no blessed second-childhood, which is the home-coming through reason and experience to what was once his by instinct. For life's middle belt of sand is bounded by gardens, and he who traverses safely the zone of doubt and pain finds beyond the self-same fountains of hope and faith at which he once ignorantly drank.

> "They alone content may gain,
> Who can good from ill divide,
> Or in ignorance abide —
> All between is restless pain."

Thus these years went by uncounted, till one of those events came from which days and years are reckoned anew. Harold died.

"I bequeath to them," said he, speaking of his children to Schonberg the last time he saw him, "the friendship which has been so long mine and of which I make you trustee, till they come of that age when they shall know better than to squander it."

The best proof of Schonberg's faithful execution of this trust was the love which Sera-

phine and Elize gave him. Madelon watched its growth with a passionate eagerness, secure at last in the thought that she and hers had found their way to the heart which Ashurst had not carried by stratagem or assault. To every heart there is one royal road — love. They had found it instinctively, she and they, without seeking for it; as little conscious of barriers as when they passed the wall which ran thickset with vines and briers between the two houses, through the gate. Any one who saw them together would know that they had entered by this ever-open door.

After Harold's death, Madelon realized that he alone had stood between her and that home-sickness which belongs to her race. She talked now freely with Schonberg of what before she had scarcely thought. He became more and more the friend in whom she confided, since she had no longer him whom she loved. During all these years she had heard no word from her father. She wrote now, for the sake of her children; but her letter was returned unopened. The hope of reconciliation she had cherished on their account died out; sometimes it seemed to her that she alone stood in the way, and that after she had gone they would recover that of which she had dispossessed them. But she longed to see France again, and talked it over

with Schonberg in the evening hours on the piazza when the little ones were asleep.

"Yesterday," she said, one night, "I asked the Squire exactly how much I have to depend upon."

"What did he say?" said Schonberg, moving uneasily in his chair.

"He told me to ask you."

He had been dreading this question. Harold had not been given to economies: if he thought of the morrow, it was only of the picture he would paint or the one he would sell. Schonberg had already been obliged to resort to artifices, to invent explanations at the moment, even to pledge the Squire to secrecy. It was a pleasure beyond gauging, this dependence which opened up all the channels of love's activities.

"One can live so much cheaper there than here," she continued; "if I only have enough for that" — And she began to dream.

Schonberg was silent. There would be no pleasure left if his affection was dragged into the light and gilded over with gold. He liked gratitude; but he detested its expression. And Madelon! with her pride — that keen knife with which we wound ourselves, which we draw across the very bonds of love and sheathe in our own hearts. No, she must not know.

"Harold would never speak of these things," she said, coming out of her dream.

"There is nothing to fear," said Schonberg, astonished at what he was saying; "you have enough; to-morrow we will talk about it."

The next morning he walked into the Squire's office. A silent man was the Squire, with cold blue eyes, a straight mouth without lips, and thin hair; one of those men universally respected, who die amid great show of regret, leave examples worthy of imitation, and whom nobody loves. And there, among the cases of yellow law books, the high stool, and iron safe, Schonberg made over to Madelon Fleming, and placed in her name, for her, her heirs and assigns forever, the half of his fortune. Why? Perhaps to save his conscience the lie of the night before, or, since he could not efface from her heart its sorrow, to shield it at least from anxiety.

But Madelon never saw again the sunny fields of France. The energy of her life ebbed steadily after Harold's death. Unaccountable as it is, the stronger nature, on which the weaker leans, often frets itself to sleep when the object of its activities is withdrawn; it is as if the oak failed when the vine it supports dies. Thus Harold and Madelon both disappeared from the shaded paths of the little village, and under the pines of its secluded churchyard slept the sleep of the faithful, if not that of the strictly traditional just; and Schonberg, who had entered

the Fleming home as the traveler enters the inn, seeking shelter from the rain and night, and who had lingered there as the traveler lingers at the fireside, loath to pursue his journey, was left alone with his trust. The net of circumstance had closed, and held him fast.

"Between your garden and your books you lead a very quiet life," said the minister to him one day. In the minister's simplest sentences there was often the shadow of a hidden reproof.

"I find a new coin every time I go over my estate," was the reply.

X.

There was something in Seraphine akin to himself which drew out Schonberg's sympathy and admiration. Both had his love, but whereas Elize won it, Seraphine commanded it; and at times, face to face with this graver but no less willful nature, he felt that an hour for control and advice might come when it would neither take the one nor brook the other. "Elize," he said to himself, "has so much sympathy; every contact is a discharge. But Seraphine! she accumulates electricity like a Leyden jar."

There was absolutely no outward resemblance

between her and Noël; but the subtler affinities do not reside in color and form. No merely outward resemblance could have so startled him as did at times the mingling of contained strength and willful purpose, of impulse and reserve, with which Seraphine confronted him. It was not her look, but her way of looking, that brought back to him the river bank at Anseremne. In this mental resemblance — which even in the child at St. Malo he had recognized, fugitive and phantom-like as it then was — he found at first a sad, consoling pleasure. But as she matured, above all as the years went by and she became his own care and preoccupation, this likeness grew more striking, and gave birth to a strange apprehension, a half-confused foreboding, which troubled his heart. He was no coward to Fate, though he recognized it in the very act of antagonizing it; but there were times when the Past, often more real then the Present, seemed to throw its shadow forward into the Future. And then, what weapons Love puts into the hands of Fear! the senseless fear at which he laughed. What, a tragedy in Ashurst! Why not in Ashurst as in Anseremne? Had not Seraphine all those elements which make life momentous for their possessor? "Dear, solemn, Seraphine," as Elize used to say, "who makes alliances for life and death."

She had inherited from her father something of the New England character, but it was not easy to see where the native and the alien met. She was too near the sources to have become a new type. At times the French inheritance unexpectedly appeared in its own purity, a sudden surprise; and then, like the theme of which we catch at intervals a strain amid the variations of the composer, to charm by the singleness and freshness of its expression. She possessed great naturalness, but no transparency. The most striking feature in her appearance was a high, rather narrow forehead, which she concealed in part by her hair, and which gave her face an intense expression. The same intensity of nature was heard in her voice, soft in its inflections, but with undertones of sadness, even severity; and there were times when they rose above the rest with subdued menace of authority. Elize recognized this authority without having ever really aroused it. In such life as they knew together, it was a quiet resisting force, unobtrusive, but ready for the whirlwind.

Elize was the child of Madelon. Like her she wielded without effort and without vanity the weapons of fascination and grace, touching all the gamut of sensation and emotion with a delicacy and quick perception which gave her the charm of variety. In Ashurst people were

of one mould. They thought, talked, and acted very much alike. If they were not dressed, Schonberg said, it would have been difficult to distinguish one from the other. But Elize could be several people at once, changing color like the chameleon, yet never losing her identity. She consulted no standards, and knew no models of propriety she herself did not suggest; giving full play to the fertility of her resources, often creating more emotion than she felt, and developing on contact with others the mobility of her nature, without which, constancy, if a jewel, is one without sparkle.

The minister called her Elizabeth, as if there were something shallow and unstable in the very word Elize, which the moral tone of its English synonym could rectify. But the minister read books more and better than human nature.

XI.

Opposite the Flemings a gilded gate, set in a massive wall, guarded the entrance to The Towers. Though on a summit of a slope, its red walls were not visible from the road, being hidden by the surrounding trees. It was a hazardous combination of styles, singular but not quaint, irregular but tame. The very swallows passed

it by for Schonberg's projecting eaves, in whose sheltering shadows they built their nests; for the peaked roof and gables of the Flemings, where they chattered among the flowers that climbed the lattice and peeped in at the diamond panes.

In former times, when Mr. Ferguson was living, strangers in Ashurst were taken to see the grounds and gaze at the great façade, which rose suddenly to view where the winding avenue emerged from among the elms and firs upon the open lawn. Even then, however, the house was rarely occupied. Rowan, the only son, was in Europe, and Mr. Ferguson, after his wife's death, seldom left the city. In meeting him on one of those occasional visits he paid to Ashurst, one felt very much as when, walking down the gravelled path, the silent stately house appeared, — both were made to be looked at, and few who looked would care to live in the one or with the other.

"Uncle," said little Elize to Schonberg once in the old days when they sat under the honeysuckles of the piazza with Madelon, "if that house is The Towers, what is the name of our house?" "The Snuggery," replied Schonberg, taking the little girl in his arms; and so it came to be called ever after; and when Harold, whose buoyant temperament often succumbed to trifles, grew dissatisfied, Madelon would ask, "Which

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will you choose, dear, The Snuggery, or The Towers?" which brought out the sun again.

Why Mrs. Ferguson had not lived with her husband in the city, where he spent most of the year, everybody had conjectured, but nobody knew. She existed now only as a memory in Ashurst, the memory of a silent, retiring woman, mingling rarely in society, whose face had the sweetness of sadness, but from whose lips a watchful curiosity had never heard a murmur. Had the walls of The Towers spoken, they would quite likely have disappointed the curious. The fate of first hopes is so universally, if tacitly, conceded, as to have lost all its tragic force. Every life is strewn with the ruins or haunted by the visions of habitations built in its morning, — habitations which either perished with occupancy or remained forever dreams; and no doubt many would have considered The Towers a more ample compensation than the evening commonly offers the morning.

"Do you know what she reminds me of?" Harold had once said, as the Ferguson carriage rolled through the gate with its lonely occupant; "of what a flatterer said to Antony of woman: 'Between them and a great cause they should be esteemed nothing.'"

"Ah! a great cause, perhaps, — but money!" said Madelon.

Yet the owner of The Towers had not been without defenders. On the day of his funeral Schonberg walked home with the minister, who on parting with him at his gate had said, —

"Well, he was a just man." The minister was celebrated for his saving clauses.

"I have observed," said Schonberg, looking hard at his feet, "that an excess of one quality is always bought at the expense of another. If a man be absolutely just, he will be absolutely merciless. I would not trust absolute justice to any but a god."

"We must give him his due," replied the minister.

"I was speaking of justness," said Schonberg curtly. "What did the Jew say? Be just one towards another? Not a bit of it. Do as thou wouldst be done by; that is the only justness. All the rest is chips, dry as geometry."

Much to Ashurst's surprise, Mr. Ferguson's estate was found on his death to be in what was called an "embarassed condition." He had begun life with an end in view, and this end he had attained. At first, as with the mariner who creeps to windward, progress had been slow, and his hand never left the helm. But then the helm was steady. In this first period of his career he risked little and economized every-

thing. In the second he drew a danger line about certain safe investments sufficient to meet his yearly expenses, from the least personal item to the brilliant flower exhibitions which constituted one of Ashurst's annual attractions. He found economy not inconsistent with display, and practiced it as before. But besides this prudently reserved capital, which occasioned him no concern, was another, a floating, uncertain wealth, ever shrinking and expanding, which gave to life all its zest. The former was food and clothing, the gratification of vanity, and the love of ostentation; the latter fed the thirst for excitement begotten in the long windward beat and not allayed by arrival in port. For a long time this prudent distinction was maintained. But the intoxication of success has this in common with the grosser form, that it leads men to assume risks and incur perils from which soberness would flee. Before the fair gales of prosperity, the pressure of the ship's helm close-hauled to the wind — a constant reminder of the point to be weathered — disappears; and it was thus at last that Mr. Ferguson embarked upon enterprises which compromised his reserves. His ship might have outlived the storm had not the pilot succumbed at the critical moment; ashore, and masterless, it went to pieces in the hands of the wreckers, and, with the exception of a legacy

from his mother, Rowan found himself stripped of all a reasonable expectation had led him to look upon as his own.

His father's death was a shock, but not an affliction. There had always existed between them such a gulf of nature that sympathy had never gained on the submission of the child or the authority of the father. This authority, though silent, was none the less irksome. Mr. Ferguson was too indifferent to be inquisitive. He had given his son the best education purchasable with legal tender. He himself had not enjoyed such advantages, but he vaguely approved of them, as also of Rowan's life abroad. In his opinion there was no education but life. He could see his tact, his judgment, his nerve, develop with experience, but he could not trace the influence of Greek roots or logarithms into success, — "any more than you can find the food in the muscle," some one said to him; to which he replied that "chips and confections were not food." He had achieved success as the bee makes honey, by persistent work; giving as little heed to the fragrance and beauty of the things among which he moved, as does that industrious rover flying from flower to flower on purely commercial transactions. But behind this tolerant indifference Rowan knew that his father regarded certain professions as profitless

trades, to be indulged in as whims are, — if one can afford to; and that he expected him to return in due time, and take his place in the city. There was a glad sense of relief at the bottom of his heart when that wall of cold opinion which circumscribed his life disappeared, and he saw no longer stretching before him the iron track his father had laid into his future.

He had been amusing himself abroad with painting; now he settled down to work. The loss of fortune, uncovering the spur of necessity, converted a pastime into a profession, and made aims of desires.

XII.

There was another person involved in the disaster to Mr. Ferguson's estate, — his ward and Rowan's cousin, Gladys.

After two years of legal complications which threatened to be interminable, Gladys had accepted The Towers in liquidation of her claims; for after her uncle's affairs had passed through the hands of the wreckers, this cumbersome property alone remained. Gladys had visited her uncle when a little girl, but was a stranger in Ashurst, and had, in fact, made only a single preliminary inspection of The Towers before

coming to take possession for the summer. She had scarcely arrived when a letter from Rowan announced his return from Europe, and a visit to Ashurst.

Gladys had not seen him since he went abroad. Meanwhile, the wheel of fortune had made a revolution. He could not of course hold her to account for its reverses, yet she did not look forward to the meeting with perfect serenity. She had often tried to imagine herself in Rowan's place, — where in fact she was, — and, judging others by herself, this mode of generalization had led her to conclusions with reference to her cousin's state of mind not altogether satisfactory. But she was no more to blame than he. Certainly, with all her delicacy of invention, she would never have dared to offer compensation.

This letter stirred other thoughts also. She had always liked Rowan, though she had never been able to manage him, and had once decided that on that account, after all, she did not like him. This decision rested on an effort of the will rather than a state of mind, and to maintain its integrity the effort had to be occasionally repeated, which in time becomes tiresome. But this decision had to all appearances been a final one, for shortly after Rowan's departure Gladys became Mrs. Temple.

Whatever the thoughts his return evoked, she

had regained her composure when he came up the steps of the terrace at the hour mentioned in his letter. She was sitting under the awning among the flowers, her lap full of bright-colored wools, which formed an effective contrast with her simple toilette, — a very pretty picture. It was one of luxury, — Gladys never disguised it, — but it formed the background not the foreground of her pictures.

Rowan answered the question she had been debating while sitting there in the momentary expectation of hearing his steps on the gravel, as to whether she should or should not kiss him affectionately, by lifting her fingers to his lips with a —

"Good morning, Cousin Gladys."

"One would think I was a princess," she said with a reproachful look, though the solution of her question flattered her.

"If you are not a princess, I at least am a vassal," said Rowan; "that is, with your permission. I wish to rent of Your Highness the small house by the ferry."

This house was a dependency of The Towers, in a lane which, once a road, had not known a carriage wheel since the bridge replaced the ferry.

"But, Rowan," said Gladys, "surely you are going to stay with us?"

"No," said Rowan, "thank you."

"But, Rowan, everything is ready. Your room" —

"Thank you; you are very kind, but you can be kinder."

"You shall be free as — as I am," urged Gladys.

"I want to be more so. Besides, I have sent my boxes to the house already."

"Before even asking me?"

"Well, you can still make your terms."

"Terms! business! are we not cousins?"

"On that account the business is all the more important."

"But how will you live, Rowan? You cannot" —

"Oh, I have engaged an old woman. She is probably waiting now on the doorstep for the key. Then, I shall not stay long."

"And you came this morning!"

"This morning, cousin."

"And you have engaged a servant already!"

"Why not? Is there anything very difficult in hiring an old woman?"

"But can she cook?"

"We shall see. Have you any more 'buts,' Cousin Gladys?"

"I should have none, if you came here."

"But — I don't choose to, cousin."

"You are unkind, Rowan, and a trifle — impolite."

"And you are very arbitrary. In fact, it is for that reason" —

"With a tenant," she said quickly, "one has the right to be. But with a guest" —

"Oh, a guest!" interrupted Rowan, laughing; "what! you would make a guest of your cousin?"

Gladys' eyes fell.

"You can neither be at home, nor a guest, here. But am I to blame, Rowan?"

"Are you to blame — for my recollections? No," he said absently.

"Why do you come?" she asked, after a pause, lifting her eyes again.

"To see you, cousin."

"Nonsense," said Gladys, reviving and flushing with pleasure.

"For what else? I know no one here."

"Then why do you come back?"

"My first reason you do not believe, my second you will not understand. I was a child here."

"Yet you know no one."

"No — but associations do not make the charm of childhood."

"Well, then, places."

"No, nor places. But the key, cousin; will you send it, or shall I take it?"

"Wait, I will get it," and Gladys disappeared through the glass doors. "I suppose I ought to present it with bended knees on a cushion of crimson velvet," she said, returning with the key.

"In token of welcome?"

"No, of defeat."

She walked with him across the terrace to the steps.

"Do you find many changes, Rowan?" she asked.

He looked at her and smiled.

"The trees grow; that is about all."

"Why not come and take dinner with me to-night?" she said. "I am all alone. Or have you stocked your pantry already?"

"Gladly. Is Mr. Temple here?"

"Jack? Oh, I expect him to-morrow night." She had absolutely forgotten she was married; she often did, though not to her detriment. "We will have a cozy chat this evening," she added. "You have to right yourself."

"I? Right myself?"

"Yes, you. The absent are always wrong."

"And by way of compensation are soon forgotten."

She laughed. "We shall see."

"Well, then, till dinner;" and he went down the steps.

XIII.

The doors of the house in the lane turned that afternoon on hinges which had not creaked for years. It was a small house, overshadowed by lindens and buried in lilacs, with low, rambling outbuildings that might have been builded in a dream. Within reigned the disorder of arrival. Boxes, trunks, furniture, were piled about in confusion. A little old woman, dull-eyed and wrinkled, struggled amid this chaos with the silent mechanical energy of a mercenary.

The windows were open. Odors of earth and forest came in with the warm summer air to take possession again of the rooms so long deserted. Indifferent to the confusion, Rowan's dog, a silky but muscular setter, lay on a rug near the door, his nose between his paws, his eyes following his master. "What matters it all!" said that eye to his master's, "*you* are here. But come! let us go out into those wide fields where I hear the song of the robin and the leap of the hare; there is home!"

Rowan was tired. He flung himself into a chair by the window, while the old woman worked on in silence. The dog came and laid his head upon his knee, fixing his liquid eyes on his master's. "Come," they said; "see how patient I

am. Listen! how the birds sing." Rowan gave some directions, put on his hat, and went out the door.

Home! the lane hedged in with a tangle of blackberries and dwarfed shrubs, the green fields spotted with yellow blossoms, the hills asleep in the sun, — they were all his. It was home.

On the edge of the wood the dog paused to see which way his master should go; but Rowan threw himself down in the shade of the hemlocks, and the dog crouched quietly beside him, his head close to his hand.

How short a time it seemed since Rowan the child ran in those meadows, and the bees rose from the clover as just now, when he passed by; when life was full of serenity, and confidence in happiness deeper than happiness itself; when each day a capacity unfolded like a bud, and the ear had not yet heard the footfall of that mysterious Presence which blots desire and disappointment alike from creation.

The dog's eyelids were slowly closing. What had he to do with these things? He knew his master's eye when it spoke to him, when the gun was taken from the rack and the leash slipped from the collar; but now his master was asleep, — asleep with his eyes wide open. That was his habit. Well, he too would doze awhile.

No, associations did not constitute the charm of childhood, nor yet places, — the wood whence the brook sallied, the meadows where it slept. What we go back to seek there is the bloom of our own nature. We would fain escape that angel whose flaming sword bars the past, and creep back again into our Eden, hoping to find there our lost selves.

Men were raking the hay in the fields beyond. The dog raised his head, and listened to their shouts as they guided the oxen, to the creak of the burdened wheel.

Beyond the road, Rowan could see the white stones of the village graves. His mother was there, under the pines. Too little of influence that gentle life had had upon his, — scarcely more than the star upon the wind and waves of the sea. But now that she was gone, his thoughts turned towards her, as the eye of the sailor seeks the star when it is overswept and hidden by the storm. How soft the afternoon light, like twilight, under the pines. Nature herself seemed to acquiesce in the peace of that secluded spot. What cant we fall into, thought Rowan. Nature! she goes her way, — kind if we will lie down with the dog, that knows not of these things; if we will be satisfied, as the flower is, to scatter in her garden a little seed; but to the voices of the soul dumb and inexorable, as if no man did pray.

"Come!" said the dog, sitting up on his haunches, with his eyes fixed upon the wood, where the leaves rustled; "there is a squirrel over there among the acorns, or a partridge looking for berries in that cover which slopes to the brook."

Rowan rose, shaking the red, hemlock spines from his clothes. Across his path the dog ran joyously, starting the squirrel from his notch in the oak, the partridge from her dusty hollow in the fallen tree; then leaped to the crest of the rocky point overlooking the river, where, trembling with excitement, one paw raised, he listened for the stir of the leaf or the snap of the twig that betrays the quarry. When Rowan had climbed the height, he was far away on the meadow below, following the steady flight of a hawk. Rowan smiled as he watched them, — the silent sailing of the bird, fanning the air with the tips of its wings, the bark of the panting dog, following hard with eager eye. Nestor never caught his bird. But instinct was stronger than experience. Why not, indeed? What a fine world, forsooth, would this be if reason could rule passion, and experience clip the wings of desire!

A path led along the crest of the rocks. Over the crisp moss, sprinkled with acorns, down the uneven steps of the ledges, Rowan followed it

into the young forest of birches and maples, breast high. Nestor, returned from his chase, walked behind with dripping tongue.

The path widened now to a wood road, close set with a wall of young trees, among which it wound between black stumps, scarred by fire but tipped with mosses, scarlet and gray.

"Nestor!" said Rowan, turning suddenly to the dog at his heels, "we must go back. We have to go to our cousin's dinner."

Nestor's answer was a low growl.

"What is it?" said Rowan, listening. Yes, there were footsteps among the dry leaves, and as he turned, a woman, bareheaded, appeared, like an apparition, close beside him, at the turn of the road. It was Seraphine.

A momentary fear filled her dark eyes.

"Down, Nestor!" said Rowan, in a whisper to the dog, who still growled.

Her dress touched him as she passed by. He looked up, still holding the dog by the collar, but she was gone. Was it a dream? For only now that she was gone did he see her slim figure, the crimson dress, the black-lace scarf about her throat, the midnight hair over the midnight eye, and the red flush of surprise on her cheek.

Nestor wagged his tail. How should he know whom to greet, or of whom to beware? His scent was keen for the step of the fox, and his

eye caught the quiver of a leaf in the still wood. But what should he know of human destinies, — that lock in the glance of an eye, at the touch of a crimson dress, and become one forevermore.

XIV.

Whether because Rowan was a little early or dinner a little late, Gladys managed to secure a *tête-à-tête* with her cousin beforehand, in which she rambled over Europe with him in so Bohemian a fashion that he almost fancied he was sipping ices under the arcades of San Marco, or chocolate on the banks of the Guadalquivir, instead of sitting on the terrace in the sleepy calm of Ashurst.

"So you paint now?" said Gladys, with that taint of depreciation in her voice which conveyed what she did not say.

"A little, cousin."

"I never expected you would be a painter, Rowan."

"No, nor I. But for misfortune we should sometimes sail down the Rubicon, thinking Rome was at its mouth."

She looked at him meditatively a moment, and then, resuming her work, remained a long time absorbed apparently in its intricate design.

"You manage to extract a good deal of comfort out of misfortune," she said, at last.

"It 's not an unmixed evil."

"How very philosophical we are, cousin," she said, mimicking him.

"We do not philosophize at our age; it is always the future, never the past." Gladys' face flushed visibly. "A life must sink its three times before it submits to destiny."

"How many chances have you left?" she asked, playing with her rings.

"You have all three, cousin."

"Ah, you think so?"

"I judge by appearances."

She shook her head. "They are deceitful."

"Not in your case."

"O King Solomon!" she exclaimed; "your wisdom would crush us . . . if it were not lightened a little by its conceit. Do you think you have found the bottom when you have reached the end of your plummet?"

"Come, come," said Rowan, "I thought we were talking about appearances."

"Well, be it so; and because I have not aged horribly, therefore" — she paused.

"Therefore what, cousin?"

"Nothing, — give me your arm, please; dinner is ready."

Gladys knew the difference between the pleas-

ure of eating and the pleasure of dining; as also, — such is the poverty of perfection, — that all good dinners would be wearisomely alike but for the sparkling wines of society. Moreover, conversation *à deux* was her delight, though only with a cousin. Coffee was served on the terrace, where she entertained Rowan in the long twilight with her views on life in general, and in Ashurst in particular.

"Tell me, Rowan, really, why do you come back here?"

"I 've told you once," replied he, watching her needle.

"Yes, sentiment. Excuse me, but I don't believe in it."

"That 's usually the case with things we don't understand."

"Perhaps I disbelieve in it because I understand it so well," she said.

"Am I forbidden to tread my native soil?" asked Rowan, looking from her fingers to her eyes.

"Oh, it 's patriotism, is it? I did n't know you were so fond of America."

"I 'm not, to the extent of believing it contains all the attractions, any more than one person possesses all the virtues."

"We don't cultivate the virtues here," replied Gladys; "we simply exterminate the vices; it 's more simple."

Rowan laughed. "You are quite an observer. How many days have you been here?"

"It does n't require a very acute observer to see that theology and society are very curiously intertwined in Ashurst," said Gladys.

"Theology! I never expected to see you interested in theology."

"I am not," and Gladys shrugged her shoulders imperceptibly; "one does n't have to study codes to feel them. I suppose," — she continued, laying aside her work, for the light was waning, — "I suppose you are a confirmed bachelor now, with all your habits fixed."

"If they are good ones they are better than friends," said he, examining the pattern she had laid down.

"You will have to forswear some of them here, and form some new ones. I have already."

Rowan walked to the railing and looked down on the lawn. The stars and the fireflies were beginning to show themselves.

"If I molest nobody, nobody will molest me," he said, carelessly.

"Oh, you are going to play the hermit."

"I 'm going to rest, whatever that may be."

"What a superfluity of reasons you have," said Gladys, talking to his back. "The last is the worst one, however."

"Why?" said Rowan, turning around.

"Well, you are not adapted to solitude. A fish with wings must fly, you know; and if there are eagles in the air, there are also sharks in the sea. Perhaps you can do as the fable suggests, swim close to the air and fly close to the sea."

"I don't understand you."

"Oh, nothing; only that it is absurd for you to play the hermit. It may do very well for Dr. Schonberg, but it 's not your *métier*."

"So Dr. Schonberg is still here, is he?"

"Probably," said Gladys, leaning over the railing beside him. "The Flemings have called, but not he; he 's not very sociable, I believe. Do you remember the Flemings, Rowan?"

"Only the name," he replied, putting on his hat.

She was disappointed at his going so soon, but for some reason did not betray it.

"Do you ever paint portraits, Rowan?" she asked, at the terrace steps.

"No, never."

"But mine? — if I asked you. I think it would be a good idea, before I sink my third time. That is, if your charges are not exorbitant; business between cousins, you know, is very important."

"I do not paint portraits, cousin."

"Cousin! why do you call me cousin? You might say Mrs. Temple once in a while, or Gladys."

"It really makes no difference, Gladys."

"No difference!" she exclaimed impatiently. "A name is a door, sir. Is there no difference between the front door which the servant opens and the lattice wicket which the mistress raises herself? But the portrait," she said, averting a reply.

"Are you serious?"

"Always."

He hesitated a moment. "Well, come Friday, in the morning."

"And in the mean time, I shall see you, of course."

"If I get lonely."

"Or if your cook fails."

"Oh, in that case, undoubtedly. Good-night," and he went down the steps into the shadows of the trees lining the lawn.

XV.

Almost every one liked Gladys.

The majority of us are soon weighed and measured, and in spite of some differences of opinion these estimates converge on the whole, like the rays of a reflector, into a tolerably definite image which stands for the reality. We are sometimes astonished when this double faces

us; but surprise us as it may, we have generally no difficulty in recognizing it. And yet about Jack and Gladys Temple the widest differences of opinion prevailed. The greater part of one sex, whenever within her range, saw themselves as in a glass, — a magic glass reflecting exactly what they wished to see, — and were correspondingly flattered. Others, with less vanity and more penetration, admired the glass itself, its crystalline transparency and clear depths. A few careful observers had noticed that it revealed everything but itself. Finally there were the cynics who had discovered how very thin even the best of mirrors are.

But the most cynical of Gladys' acquaintances were still her admirers. Her art was so perfect, so delicate, that if not altogether deceived by the illusion, they were still fascinated or amused. One soon forgets the side of the moon one does not see.

Her marriage with Jack, as well as Jack's own estimate of his wife had been a fruitful subject of speculation. Had he married Gladys' money? Not only did he have sufficient of his own, but this supposition involved the conception and execution of a formidable scheme, the conquest of Gladys herself. It was certainly difficult to imagine Jack laying siege to Gladys, or Gladys falling into any snare Jack could weave. The

romance of her marriage was more commonly constructed on the basis of a worldly ambition which, in availing itself of the indispensable privileges of the married state, had very prudently contrived that the safeguard should not also be a prison. If this were true, it was the only instance in which the shrewdness known to underlie Jack's quiet good nature had failed him. Moreover, his perfect serenity and contentment warranted the suspicion that he was possibly the deeper of the two. When some one at the club pityingly referred to him as a "led horse," the reply came: "Yes, led to water with a silk ribbon."

This serenity was mutual. No one had any reason to suspect the slightest discord. The traditional valet or maid could have testified that Jack and Gladys formed a model example of unruffled conjugal happiness, and that never a word or a look betrayed a worm in the bud. Even her aunt Isabel, who was always constructing plans for others out of the débris of her own experience, and who was sure that Gladys once had a heart of which her cousin Rowan might have been the possessor, had almost forgotten this episode, and believed men and women were no longer what they used to be when she was young. In those days, at least, men had eyes to see and women eyes to compel.

When Jack came down, Saturday night, from the city, the house seemed to have been running all summer; and Sunday morning there was a dainty breakfast on the terrace, at which Gladys presided with her usual affability, for say what one might about Gladys, her vivacity and serenity of temper were not confined to gaslight. She was as fascinating and well dressed at breakfast as at a dinner party.

"There are some very amusing people here," she said, after giving Jack a description of certain of her visitors; "and some very nice ones," she added, observing his face.

"I suppose we 're to make a lot of calls this afternoon," Jack replied, with a resigned air.

"What *are* you thinking of, Jack dear!" exclaimed Gladys, buttering a roll; "this is Sunday."

Although not ignorant of Gladys' powers of adaptation, Jack opened his eyes with a low whistle; to which Gladys, tranquilly finishing her roll with her innocent blue eyes full on Jack's face, paid no attention.

"One may smoke here?" he said, taking out a cigar.

She made a little *moue* for an answer, and he lit his cigar. Ostensibly engaged therewith, he was in reality watching Gladys. The art of eating was one of her accomplishments. His appe-

tite was superior to hers, but he had usually to rely on his cigar in order to finish their repasts together ; a practice which Gladys allowed, even indoors.

"Is n't this lovely ! after the city," she said, looking up at her husband with the happiness that belongs to a good breakfast in the open air. "All alone here, by ourselves ; it 's like a picnic."

"*A la* Watteau," said Jack.

"You dear old fellow," and Gladys leaned over the balcony beside him, slipping her arm through his ; "if you would only exert yourself with other people as you do with me ! you can be perfect when you wish to be."

"It is n't so very difficult; with you to help, you know, Gladys."

Gladys laughed softly. She liked a compliment, even from Jack.

"I don't think we will go to church this morning," she said, as the bells of Ashurst rang out in the still air. "People will hardly expect us to, the first Sunday, you know. Besides, I have n't time to dress."

Her excuse would in all probability have proved acceptable, for the people of Ashurst to whom she referred dressed also for church every Sunday, as she did, without the suspicion of irony. Jack acquiesced. Gladys knew what he

liked and what he disliked. When he called her good-natured he paid a compliment to her powers of discrimination. The foundation stone of her creed was respect for one's aversions, and she knew Jack as the glove knows the hand.

"Don't you want to go over the house with me? There 's ever so much to be done," and Gladys grew animated. The Towers furnished an opportunity for the control of outlay, which she enjoyed more than the outlay itself. Gladys was no doll. Jack had learned long ago that if he wished to make her happy he must allow her to make her own presents. She found very little pleasure in passively receiving. Her happiness lay in the chase, though she ate the game.

"You 're not going into that on Sunday, are you, Gladys?"

She lifted her eyebrows and smiled imperceptibly, continuing in a confidential tone.

"You are not to go into the billiard-room till it is finished. I know exactly what to do with it. Have you seen the stables?"

"I went out there before breakfast."

"Are n't they nice — the box stalls? Come, dear," and she gave Jack's arm a twitch, "you shall show some interest. I have been looking forward to this all the week. I want to show you the river; it 's lovely," and Gladys put on her hat.

They walked across the lawn, soft as forest moss, and sown with white clover.

"Jack," said Gladys, — she usually reserved her surprises for the evening, when she took down her hair; but this one would not wait, — "Rowan Ferguson is here."

Although Rowan was her cousin, Jack never remembered having heard his name on Gladys' lips. He did not ask himself why, for various reasons; for one, because he knew Aunt Isabel was right when she said Gladys was proud as Lucifer; for another, because of a chance remark Gladys had once made, to the effect that people who inspired jealousy were not worth it; and last of all, because he was proud himself.

"That 's awkward, is n't it," said he, taking his cigar out of his mouth.

"Why, Jack?"

"Well, here we are, in his nest, you know."

"I don't believe he cares," she said in an absent manner, as they sauntered across the lawn. "There are better things in this world than money." Jack wondered what things Gladys could be thinking of. "I mean to devote myself to him," she added resolutely.

"You 're awfully good-natured, Gladys."

"I shall end by believing you, if you say it so often."

As they disappeared from the open into the

shrubberies, a little white bunch of muslin came running across the lawn as fast as two short bare legs tipped with pink boots would allow, uttering at intervals a frantic cry of "Papa Jack! Papa J-a-ck!" from a pair of lungs taxed to their limit by this double exertion. And although both Gladys and Jack turned at the first cry, and waited till the child had overtaken them, its apprehension of being left behind was not allayed till, its hands in theirs, it walked safely between them. Gladys waved a signal to a white-capped figure on the terrace, and the trio continued on their way to the river.

There was a boat-house on the bank, its wide piazza overhanging the water. One could look southward as far as the brown-roofed bridge uniting Ashurst with its suburb on the opposite shore. This shore was a level plain, studded with single elms unfolding like giant flowers, their slim trunks clothed with green to their bases. Beyond, clustered among trees, lay a village above whose sky-line rose a bare spire, glistening white in the sun.

What Jack was thinking of, as he watched Mab pushing twigs and stones through the railing into the water, were hard to tell. Gladys was evidently very happy. In a low cane chair, shading her eyes with her hand, the steeple over among the trees certainly did not suggest to her original sin.

She had some plans for the summer and began to discuss their details with Jack. The plans themselves she never discussed, and Jack never had occasion to thwart her. Her good taste and sense of propriety were a pure instinct, almost as destitute of morality as that other in virtue of which she loved her bath. So far as Jack knew, she had no secret plans whatever. When they were matured she made them known, and took pleasure in discussing with him their execution. If he lacked the genius of conception, his practical advice was, per contra, very shrewd. The sharpest remark Gladys had ever made to him was in reply to a caution of his in regard to an affair which she had in hand, a caution so replete with penetrative sagacity that it took away her breath. "You don't see far, Jack, dear," she said, following his advice to the letter, "but you do see the end of your nose distinctly."

People disputed amicably over this union. What was its secret, confidence or indifference? Or as a cynical Benedict put it, Two slaves or one? For there was a puzzling yet ever present happiness, so refreshing in its freedom that even those whose ideal was a complete mutual dependence, thought twice and sighed. Gladys was vaguely conscious of all this theorizing — of the thinking, if not of the thought. How we

should revolt against the theories of our neighbors! How Gladys herself would have laughed at the assertion of Jack's complete submission! She could not drive him an inch. She never tried to; her hand was too skillful not to be soft.

XVI.

Meanwhile, having exhausted the vicinity of its movable property, Mab, disposed to adventure, strayed along the bank, being cautioned by Gladys not to go out of sight and not to ruin her sash.

Reveling in an unaccustomed liberty, she had soon explored the immediate neighborhood, and began to pursue her investigations down the shore. After a soliloquy on the possibility of getting over the fence, she squeezed herself through under the lower rail, and having disposed of this difficulty satisfactorily advanced triumphantly into the field beyond. At its farther corner, in the shade of a grove of pines, her eye was caught by a summer-house, and thither the spirit of discovery and conquest led her. At the edge of the grove, however, she perceived that the house had an occupant and stopped to reconnoitre.

At first sight the strange figure of Schonberg

alarmed her, suggesting the ogre, a race in which she firmly believed. But curiosity got the better of fear, and she advanced cautiously against the enemy. Arrived within hailing distance, she held a parley.

"Halloo!" she cried.

Schonberg, turning round, saw a small figure in pink and white, its hat hanging down its back, its hands crossed behind, in an attitude of mingled defiance and good nature.

"If you'll tell me who you are, I'll tell you who I am," said Mab, drawing a few steps nearer.

"Well, who are you?" said Schonberg, struck with the fairness of this proposition, and looking at her over his glasses.

"Mabel Temple. Do you live here?" and with growing confidence she went a little closer. Schonberg, of whom children, with an insight often called perversity, were fond, closed his book. "What makes you wear that on your head?" inquired Mabel.

"To keep it warm," said he, taking off his skull-cap. "If you will give me some of your hair, I won't wear it any more."

"My mamma would n't let me," replied Mabel, who now came boldly forward, and, seating herself beside him, inspected the top of his head with a frank curiosity. Having satisfied herself

on this point, she advanced one little foot towards him and displayed a pink kid boot buttoned up to the ankle.

"I 've got some new shoes," she said; and, following up the attack, she pulled back her dress over a pair of brown knees and exhibited an undergarment stitched with pink silk, "and a new petticoat," she added, complacently.

Somewhat abashed by this proceeding, Schonberg remarked they were very pretty.

"Where 's your little girl?" pursued Mab, having settled these preliminaries.

"I have n't any *little* one," replied Schonberg.

"Why don't you buy one, then?" inquired Mab earnestly. "My mamma bought me."

"Ah," said Schonberg, becoming interested; "and who is your mamma?"

This was a rider which Mab found difficult to answer.

"Perhaps you have n't any."

Mab nodded her head and swung her legs violently in reply.

"I 've got a papa too," she added proudly.

"And did your mamma buy him also?" asked Schonberg.

Nonplussed again, Mab resolved to ask her mamma. Possibly this resolve set her in motion, for she made a revolution on her little stomach and slid off the seat.

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"I am going now," she said decisively.

"Well, good-by," said Schonberg.

She ran unsteadily between the trees to the meadow; but forgetting how far she had strayed, and seeing neither Jack nor Gladys, began to cry. Schonberg, who was watching her, laid down his book and went to her assistance. She confided her hand trustfully to his, and, with an occasional sob, kept up with his lengthy stride as best she could.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Jack, who suddenly caught sight of her as she emerged from the pines with her protector, "there 's Mab way off there with a man."

Though chatting with him the while, Gladys had followed the fluttering sash through the meadow and taken in the whole scene in the summer-house. She was usually very particular about Mab's coming into contact with strangers; but she replied quickly, "Do sit still, Jack," and, blushing faintly, disappeared behind the willows.

Mab was discoursing volubly when Gladys returned, but in the absence of all reproof grew gradually calm; and in the pleasure of an unexpected approbation forgot to ask Gladys her question.

"Who was it?" inquired Jack as they walked homeward.

"Dr. Schonberg," said Gladys.

"Sort of a hermit," suggested Jack.

"Exactly — quite inaccessible. But he has promised to dine with us. It was really very fortunate, Mab's straying over there — a special Providence."

"Sort of divine interposition," said Jack dryly.

Gladys laughed, remarking wisely that people who required so much trouble were generally worth it.

XVII.

The one person in Ashurst of whom Schonberg was afraid was, curiously enough, his servant Deborah. The consciousness of this weakness had once exasperated him. He had struggled against it with a secret sense of shame; but without avail, the resolutions which he made melting away at the sound of Deborah's heel. He finally accepted his defeat philosophically, and resignedly kept out of her way. He even at last came to look upon her as one of the necessary evils of existence, apologizing to himself for her as Montaigne did for the malady which tormented his life.

The evil in Deborah was not so much the love of tyranny; for she allowed her master a

fair measure of liberty. It was rather a contemptuous scorn for the manner in which he exercised it. In many respects she was a personification of Ashurst, a coarser, more angular, but honest censor. Her narrow horizon had given a terrible severity and fixity to her ideas which rendered her scorn sublime. There was a fibre of probity in her moral nature which saved her from bigotry and redeemed her ignorance. Schonberg could pay this tribute to her uncompromising disapproval; and while for him she was but a servant, as he, for that matter, was for her a barbarian, they entertained a mutual respect for each other. She remained in his service because she preferred masters to mistresses; and he retained her because he chose rather to endure an evil he knew than hazard others of which he knew nothing. One great virtue she possessed; she saved him from all the details of household management, to which he thus remained a stranger. He had an aversion for minutiæ, and would rather go without his dinner than plan and buy it. In this respect he was fortunate. Superiority over life depends largely upon the condition that it does not flood us with its commonalties. One may have a philosophy to withstand its sorrows, and yet succumb to its miseries.

He passed much of his time in what he called

his tea-house. It was his habit to read half aloud with the mutterings of a suppressed volcano; and this he could do here with the certainty that he would not be overheard, and that no footsteps except those he loved to hear were likely to disturb him. The mere thought of Deborah, listening to his voice in the pauses of her work with that contemptuous sniff which punctuated her silence, would have rendered him dumb. Then, too, men have their favorite places, where the hand is cunning and the mind free: an office desk, a laboratory table, a window seat, a study chair. This was his.

All the winter long, when his steps were confined to the narrow paths through the snow, he waited for spring to unlock this retreat and set the tree buds free. For here, though the water was still, he heard the rush of the Meuse. The little wood-violet lifted its white hood here, as in the woods of Anseremne; and here at nesting-time rose the song of the thrush as the lark had risen from the fields of Freyr. Here, too, was the river, — the open, magnanimous river, — where the sun searched at noon, and the stars hid at night; that had hollowed with such labor its track through the flint of the hills and the tangle of forest, barring the way; hurrying, hurrying, impatient of restraint, angry with bounds, all to rest at last, full of stars and

clouds, like a soul full of thoughts and dreams, at the end of its course near the sea. And here were the soaring shafts of the trees, that had pushed with such toil through the cover of mould and tangle of grasses barring the way — climbing, climbing fast, like a soul that spurns its clay, all to rest at last where the vision is wide and free, full of murmuring sounds and sighs; like a soul at the end of its flight, full of wonder and mystery.

Here, on the morning Rowan had fixed for the painting of his cousin's portrait, he sat where Mabel had found him, a book spread open upon his knee. His books were free from annotations, but full of scraps and odd ends of paper, covered with the hieroglyphics of a quill pen, whose splutterings and scratchings often made Elize put her fingers to her ears, and for which he carried in his pocket a small wooden vial of ink. This morning, however, the volume on his knee did not seem to hold his attention; for he looked over its open page, a large forefinger marking the place where his thoughts had last broken from the traces, rousing himself at intervals with the start of a schoolboy who dreams over his task. Suddenly a voice said, —

"Come, give this morning to me."

He looked up and saw Elize leaning on the gate in the wall.

"What will you do with it?" he asked, lowering his glasses over his nose and laying his pen in his book.

"Give it back to you, Sir Miser. I do not steal, I borrow. We will go down the river, and you shall tell me what you are reading in that book of yours; and we will come back by the meadow. See!" and she moved her foot through the grass which grew about the gate; "the dew is gone. Come."

Schonberg closed his book, and put on his wide-brimmed hat.

She led the way down the narrow path, which wound like an Indian trail along the bank, stopping now and then for a leaf of crimson and green, — those first single skirmishers which winter deploys in the autumn woods.

"Where were you all day yesterday, little girl?" asked he, following behind.

"Yesterday? I was reading. I could do nothing till I had finished my book."

"And you finished it?"

"Every word."

"What was it, — a novel? Tell me about it. You liked it?"

"Perversely," she replied, emphatically, "for the bad people made me cry with sympathy, whereas the others, one especially, who was a saint, — one ought to like saints," — and Elize

turned with a gesture which said it was impossible.

"Bah!" said Schonberg. "Saints for heaven, but for earth, heroes."

"But, uncle" —

"Do you want to admire some one?" Schonberg continued, shaking his cane in the air: "for that he may have faults, provided only he has a character."

"If you do not allow me to worship the saints, how can I ever wish to become one?"

"On the contrary, little girl, strive, — strive hard. What we admire is the desire. Goodness is not a birthright."

"I wish it were," said Elize.

"You wish to begin where Alexander left off."

"I wish to begin even with Seraphine."

"Where *is* Seraphine?" said Schonberg, suddenly stopping short in the middle of the path.

"Oh!" exclaimed Elize reproachfully, "you have only just thought of her!"

"Let us go back," said he.

"It is useless; she will not come."

"Will not come? Why not?"

"I do not know," said Elize, with a little shrug of the shoulders. "She hath bought five yoke of oxen; I pray thee have her excused."

"Humph!" said Schonberg.

They turned into the lane, Elize walking by his side.

"And *your* book; you seemed very much interested in it."

"I laid it aside when you asked me to."

"To please me."

"No, to please myself."

"Oh, but I had rather it had been to please me. You see I am not yet a saint. I even like to tyrannize a little."

"Begin now; let us see what you would do."

"Well, I would first burn up that yellow dressing-gown, which gives you the air of a mandarin."

"Ah!" said Schonberg; "I have never seen one."

"And I would order you, on penalty of the kiss which you hate, to wear the new one Seraphine made for you."

"I have laid it away honorably in lavender twigs," said Schonberg, somewhat confused by this unexpected attack.

"The honor of a gift is in its use, sir. Shall I go on?"

"By all means."

She drew a little closer, and slipped her arm through his.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, foreseeing something important.

"My courage fails me, — I play the tyrant so seldom. I think, after all, I will leave it to Seraphine."

"What! is it so terrible?"

"We even dream of it," said Elize, looking up into his face. "When one dreams, it begins to be serious."

"You improve fast, little girl. By dint of practice you will make an excellent Nero."

"If you will come, this evening after tea, we will tell you."

"But I am going out to dine this evening," replied Schonberg.

"Well, afterwards, if not too late, — will you?"

They were just passing Rowan's gate when some one called, —

"Dr. Schonberg!"

They turned and saw Gladys.

She had come on this the morning fixed for her first sitting, and had found her tenant's door open, as also that which led from the hall into the adjoining room; but no one had answered the bell, tinkling faintly from some remote place out of sight and then subsiding into silence. She had rung again, a little impatiently, and the bell, like an echo, had answered her back with an impatient jangle. She had stood for a moment with her dress in one hand, half de-

cided to return, but the sun was hot, and the open door was a temptation. If only Mab had been with her, the indiscretion would have been divided by two. However, she must get out of the sun, against which even her parasol was scant protection. One more ring, — one might fancy the bell was angry, and had fairly turned over in its rage, — then silence again. She advanced to the threshold of the inner door. "Rowan!" Then she went in.

She swept the room with that critical glance which is given an apartment whose master or mistress is not there to defend it. It was evidently not one which had acquired its possessions during long years of occupancy, for they had the air rather of temporary guests than of old familiars. Still it was a pleasant room, and it contained objects which attracted her eye. There was, for example, before her a chair whose utility the carver had so disguised by the caprices of his decorative art, that she paused, fascinated, without thinking of sitting down. Above her head, too, hung a curious bronze lamp inlaid with silver, and at the further door a curtain overwrought with arabesque. But that which most attracted her was an easel, half hidden behind a screen in the corner. There was a green curtain before the picture standing upon it, and in an impulse of curiosity she crossed the room

and drew it aside. Whatever it was she saw there, it plunged her in deep thought; and then seemed suddenly to remind her that curiosity, though a surface passion easily satisfied, is not always innocent, and often pregnant with consequences; for she abandoned her explorations and retreated into the sun. She felt, however, less inclined than before to give up her appointment, and was proposing to herself to find some shady spot where she should wait, when she saw Dr. Schonberg and Elize.

"Have you seen my cousin, Mr. Ferguson?" she asked, with a smile of recognition for Elize.

"No," replied Schonberg, taking off his hat, "but we heard his dog barking on the river."

"How provoking!" said Gladys, looking down the lane. "I wanted so much to see him."

"I have not seen him for many years," said Schonberg, replacing his hat, "but, if you wish me," — her look was so appealing, — "I will walk to the end of the lane, and, if he is there" —

"Oh, how very kind of you," said Gladys. "I do not wish to give you any trouble" — But Schonberg was already in motion. "Will you come in and wait, Miss Fleming?" she said to Elize, opening the gate.

They walked up the narrow path, lined with

lilacs, and sat down on the broad stone step before the door, chatting together. Once Gladys went down to the gate, but no one was in sight.

"Come," she said, "let us go in; it is so warm. Have you met my cousin Rowan?" she asked, as they entered the room.

"No," said Elize, looking about her.

"How cool it is indoors," Gladys said. "Sit down here, Miss Fleming."

"Oh," replied Elize, bending over the figures with folded wings which supported the arms of the chair, "I should not dare to."

Gladys laughed, and made room for her on the lounge. "An artist is always picking up pretty things, — except fans," she said, improvising one with her handkerchief. "See the tapestry on that screen. From its crimson dye I think it must be very old Flemish."

Elize crossed the room to examine its network of strange leaves and legendary animals. Seraphine was skillful in embroidery. "I wish my sister," she said, "could" —

Elize stopped abruptly. Behind the screen was the picture which Gladys had left uncovered.

It was only the picture of a woman, advancing under the trees of a wood. But to this woman it seemed as if the artist had wished to sacrifice everything. From out the background

of uncertain shadows which surrounded her, which deepened and receded as the eye sought to penetrate them, she came forth as from the dreams of a lifetime. Except the crimson of her dress, a severity of coloring, an indistinctness and pallor of touch, made this picture indeed a dream rather than a portrait, and before it Elize stood spellbound, as if Seraphine herself had answered her thought and risen before her in person.

There was a step on the walk and a knock on the door, but Elize heard neither.

"Your cousin was on the river," Schonberg was saying to Gladys; "he will be here presently."

"You have been very kind, Dr. Schonberg," said Gladys; "will you not come in and wait a few moments?"

"Thank you, but if Miss Fleming" —

At the sound of her name Elize turned. There was such a look of wonder and surprise upon her face that even Gladys was embarrassed; but only for an instant.

"Do wait," she said to Schonberg; "I will go to the gate and tell my cousin how his castle has been captured."

"Come!" said Elize in a whisper, after she had gone. He followed her beckoning finger and looked over her shoulder. Seraphine!

He knew that face well, though joy had transfigured it. From those dark eyes it appealed to him, yet threatened him. If he had moved, it would have been to draw instinctively the curtain before them, as if he had violated the secrets of a Vestal Virgin. What was she doing here? Who was this man that he should paint a world in her eye, and mould her face to his fancy? But for Elize he might have remained standing there till Gladys had returned with Rowan. But she put her hand within his and drew him to the door.

"You are not going to wait?" exclaimed Gladys, with so genuine a surprise and regret in her blue eyes that Elize was disarmed.

"Thank you," she replied.

There was a shade of embarrassment in her voice. But why? after all. *She* was not the culprit. Not Gladys even — perhaps. There was very likely no culprit at all except that Harlequin Chance, that had gotten hold of the reins for an instant.

This was precisely what Gladys was saying to herself, as she walked back to the house, though she knew that it was from her hands the reins had been stolen. She had a little dispute with herself as to whether she should draw that innocent green curtain, which had first fired her curiosity, over the picture, and made up her mind

very decidedly that she would not — for if Gladys was curious, she was also courageous; and it was in the midst of these reflections that Nestor bounded into the room, followed by Rowan.

XVIII.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, cousin," said Rowan, "but, to be truthful, I had forgotten our engagement entirely."

"And, to be equally truthful, I have not been waiting; that is, I found here so much to interest me that I had forgotten it."

"Ah!" said Rowan, standing his paddle, still wet, in the corner and beginning his preparations for Gladys' picture. She watched him with interest, while Nestor, for whom these preparations meant that play was over, stretched himself on the rug for sleep.

"Don't you and Nestor ever get tired of each other?" asked Gladys.

"Sometimes," replied Rowan.

"Why don't you soar higher, cousin? I told you the other day that it was not good to be alone."

"Society is not company," said he.

"Well, go on. Finish your quotation."

"Was I making one?"

"Oh, fie! the bad memory!" said Gladys, sitting down in the chair where Elize had not dared to. "You omit the saving clause. 'Society is not company where there is no love.'"

"Oh!" said Rowan again, indifferently.

"Apropos of portraits, you quote very aptly," and Gladys played with her parasol; "there is still more which you forget."

"Repeat it, cousin; it will amuse me."

"Don't you remember? 'Society is not company, and faces are but pictures in a gallery' — where there is no love, you understand. But with love, pictures will even take the place of faces."

Rowan made no reply, and went on with his preparations.

"I am curious to see what you will make of my portrait," continued Gladys, "since you never paint them."

"No, never."

Gladys smiled. "Not even from memory?"

"Memory cannot paint portraits, cousin; it is too forgetful."

"And what do you intend to make for me, — a photograph? I do not wish one. I come to the artist for a little magic, the magic of perspective. Naked truth is odious. Can't you dress it up a little, — disguise it in fable, for example, as the poets do? I have not come to be copied."

"For what then, — to be flattered?"

"Yes, delicately, if I have any fugitive excellences which you can seize. A photograph is an attitude, an expression, a mood. I have a hundred such, moods and photographs both."

"I can well believe it."

"But I have one which underlies them all. One gesture — everybody has one — worth pages of analysis."

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, search, and find it."

"Ho, ho!" said Rowan, sitting down before his easel. "You are exacting. It seems the portrait is to be a judgment."

"Certainly. Who cares for the reflection unconscious mirrors make? there is only one worth looking at, that of the human eye."

"Stand up, cousin; let me look at you."

"One would imagine you were a Greek master inspecting an athlete," she said, walking before him. "Do I walk badly?"

"No, not ordinarily," said Rowan, "unless when, like Montesquieu's wife, you try to walk better, and then you limp a little."

"Oh, Rowan!"

It is not to be inferred from this exclamation that Gladys' feelings were really hurt. She knew very well that if certain people descended to flattery, it was because they despised.

She took her seat again in the high-backed chair whose rigid outlines the sculptor had left unbroken, though every surface had its garland and scroll. She had taken off her hat, which lay in her lap with her parasol. Rowan was already at work, and what he saw, as he looked up from time to time, were some very graceful profiles outlined against the black panel, and, between the blue velvet band in her hair and the blue silk balls which fringed her parasol, two blue eyes that could talk faster than lips. For therein, when Gladys chose, one could see at a single look the dance and the flight of all that troop of lighter thoughts and feelings which perish before they reach the lips.

Rowan was never sure whether he was at his best or worst with Gladys, although conscious he was not altogether his true self. For some reason he threw up the trenches of an unnatural dignity and reserve in her presence, as at the approach of a foe. And yet Gladys was not an enemy. Indeed, after her marriage, he had come to believe that her Aunt Isabel, who had upbraided him in her satirical fashion for short-sightedness on the eve of his departure for Europe, had herself been deceived by what on Gladys' part was merely a delight in capricious sorties on well-disposed neighbors. There was so much in his cousin he liked, that he would have

liked *her* had she permitted him to, and it was more natural to him to treat the world as it ought to be than to admit it what he found it. The supposition which formed the basis of Aunt Isabel's satire was so disquieting, that he had never been willing to give it even the consideration necessary to refute it. Had not Gladys herself refuted it? If she had really loved him, — what an idea! She loved to tease him. Whence comes the pure untainted flower of love? From the germ of a pure untainted nature only? or is the seed dropped from heaven, to bear flowers or thorns, as the soil and climate into which it falls shall determine? In one case we can tread the thistles under foot without compunction; in the other, every struggling thorn by the trodden highway is worth a sigh.

"What! have you commenced already?"

"Sit still," said Rowan.

Gladys laughed. "That is what I say to Mab. Poor child, what martyrdom! But you are not going to paint me with this dress, in this chair?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then it is to be the naked truth after all. But it seems to me I shall look like a fright. I ought to wear a close-fitting bodice of Persian silk, with a hip-girdle and sleeveless tunic, a steeple head-dress with floating veil, and pointed shoes — something Gothic and mediæval."

"On the contrary, you will be all the more effective as you are. You desired a fable, and we shall have one, — the nineteenth in the fourteenth century."

She obeyed the order to sit still better than Mab, on the whole, only twisting the silk balls of her parasol. Apparently she had some diverting thoughts. Occasionally, when Rowan's eye rested on her critically, she frowned; and once she begged permission for the nineteenth century to yawn behind its parasol, though in reality the yawn was hardly more than a sigh.

"I think I ought to tell you something, Rowan," she said, after a long silence.

"If the duty is disagreeable, defer it," said he.

"I was guilty of an indiscretion this morning, and it troubles my conscience."

"Who told you that you had a conscience, cousin?"

She looked at him quickly. She liked a little badinage, but not serious teasing.

"You are not a very encouraging confessor," she said.

"What are the requisites? First, attention, of course; well, I am all attention."

"No; first of all, curiosity."

"Well, I am all curiosity also."

"Then you will not be vexed, for curiosity was my indiscretion."

"That does not follow," said Rowan, looking up at her. "I reserve the right to be vexed. Or is absolution a prerequisite for confession?"

"Not in the least. What I tell you, I tell you for my own satisfaction," said Gladys with a dignity that was very becoming. "When I came here this morning your door was open, and I went in."

"Undoubtedly."

"Being in, I looked about."

"Naturally."

"The rest was chance" —

"Take care," interrupted Rowan, "your confession is becoming an explanation."

"I confess to an impulse of curiosity," exclaimed Gladys impetuously. "I looked at the picture because I did not know what it was," she continued with the *naïveté* of passion, "and Miss Fleming saw it because I had left it uncovered, and because she could not help it. If you insist upon fastening all the remote consequences upon the — the original culprit — find the painter."

"In other words, the confession has become an indictment," said Rowan, quietly.

"I say to you frankly, Rowan, that I am sorry for my indiscretion; and I say also that I had no idea it was a serious one till I saw the surprise on Miss Fleming's face. *Is* it serious?"

She asked this question as one shoots an arrow, with a following glance at the mark.

"Gladys," said Rowan, "you make a confession and then seek to extort one. I have not the honor to know Miss Fleming, and your curiosity" —

"I am not curious," she replied coldly. "When one has caused annoyance, one likes to know the extent of it." She rose from her seat and began to put on her gloves. "When shall I come again? Or are we children, and not to speak to each other for the present?"

Rowan laughed.

"Some people laugh when they are angry," said Gladys.

"I am not angry, and, if you will allow me, I am going to walk back with you."

"No, thank you; I prefer you should not," said Gladys, moving towards the door.

"Then I will tell you what I wish to, now," said Rowan. "In justice to Miss Fleming it should be said that she knows no more of her picture than you did this morning. I have never met her, and have only seen her once — but" — Gladys' heart fluttered in the grasp of her will like a bird held in the hand — "but — that makes no difference; I love her. Shall we still be friends, Gladys?"

"What do you mean?" she said, looking him in the face.

"I mean exactly what I say. We are not children."

Fear and pride, indignation and appeal, chased each other like shadows in the mist of her eyes.

"No — worse than children," she said, — "toys!"

XIX.

When the letter announcing Rowan's return was handed to Gladys, she herself was surprised at the effect it produced. Although eager to know its contents, she had allowed it to lie an hour unopened upon her dressing-table while finishing her toilette, in a state of pleasurable excitement which she did not seek to analyze lest it should come to an end. She had gone down upon the terrace to select some roses, and had returned to her glass to fasten them, one white and one yellow, at her throat, before taking the letter from its resting-place between her fan and laces. Even then she had put it in her pocket, and seated herself at the window with her wools; for Gladys was veritably industrious. She had finally risen abruptly, like one who finds himself going to sleep when he does not wish to, and laying aside her work had gone down to superintend the gardener who was setting out plants underneath the window; then,

while giving her directions, she broke the seal and read the letter. Thereupon she went up to the large southern chamber, the pleasantest room in the house, to say good-morning to her Aunt Isabel.

She had been brought up in the care of her aunt, and it was for this reason among others that the latter, who was a firm believer in the theory of compensation, insisted upon finishing her days with Gladys. The real feelings which these two entertained for each other were not at first sight apparent to the ordinary observer, for Gladys' aversion was streaked with a variety of other sentiments, such as gratitude, respect, and admiration; while her aunt had aversions for so many things and people, that one did not stop to connect them with any one object or individual in particular. It was not altogether infirmity which led her to sit so much alone in the great arm-chair where she ate, read, talked, and sometimes even slept. She was like an old eagle in its cage, disdaining both bars and liberty.

There went on continually a sort of duel between her and Gladys. At seventy, one does not like to be contradicted by a child. The old lady had been a "child" herself. Now, in her arm-chair, she was the spectator, critical, as must be all ex-puppets for whom the tragedy has become a comedy. She was, Gladys avowed, cross, kind-hearted, selfish, generous, by turns;

a kind of crater, which one did not care to approach too closely, bursting forth momentarily in eruptions of rebuke, irony, and good-nature, fierce, but soon over. She scolded, pardoned, derided, and petted Gladys with equal pleasure, as if the latter reminded her of a former self, which she now held off at arms' length, as she did the world in general, for alternate praise and disapproval.

Gladys brought her aunt some of the roses she had gathered, and opened her budget of morning news. The plants for the beds at the foot of the terrace wall had arrived; she was going to buy a pony for Mabel, — and, by the way, here was a letter from Rowan; and taking it from her pocket she laid it on the little table which, with its crystal bottle of salts, accompanied the great chair about the room like a satellite. After lingering awhile for the comment which did not come, she finally left the old lady with the morning papers, to which she was devoted.

Although Rowan's letter was a very brief one, later in the day she desired, for some reason, to read it again, and sent her maid for it, with some fresh flowers from among the new arrivals; but received from her aunt the reply that she had not yet read it.

Thereafter, till Rowan came, Gladys had reso-

lutely put away any thoughts this letter had suggested; and afterwards, if any questions had been raised by his arrival, she determinedly ignored them. It is so easy for the mind to postpone action, to play the neutral, and take its naps of indifference. But while it hesitates or sleeps, the heart, like a pendulum, swings on between hate and love; for it to live is to feel, to remain indifferent is to cease to beat. And if Gladys, walking home from Rowan's that morning of her first sitting, was hotly indignant, it was with this heart which, never wholly subdued, waits the opportune moment, acts and decides while the mind hesitates and reserves its verdict. What a foolish thing she had said! Toys? She had never been any one's toy — except that of chance. If he had kept his appointment — and, reviewing the incidents of the morning, her indignation rose hotter against chance, against circumstance that does not wait for decisions, and lays the heart bare with a merciless hand. She was angry too at her inability to go back to where she was the day before. If she had not cared to see what was going on in her heart, all the more was she angry to have it thrust under her eyes by a merely fortuitous concourse of events. As she went up the terrace steps, the very roses she had set out with the gardener, but a week ago,

seemed to say to her, "You cannot see us change, but look, we have grown!"

Anxiety, however, that foe to good looks and good manners, was something not to be tolerated for an instant. It can make us more wretched than circumstances warrant, and, on the theory that happiness consists only in thinking ourselves less miserable than we really are, Gladys set all her will power to work in forgetting everything but the one fact, that Dr. Schonberg was to dine with her that evening. She filled the remainder of her day full of occupation, that blessed sea of rest for troubles of all kinds, singing to herself — she had no voice — as she went about, from the dining-room to the terrace, and from the terrace to her chamber, all the latent fire pent up and covered over.

XX.

Although in itself a guest at dinner was an insignificant event for Gladys, it afforded her in this instance a welcome diversion. Furthermore, she was really interested in Dr. Schonberg. In the presence of this man, hidden away in the hermitage of Ashurst, she imagined herself face to face with a mystery, and was not one to rest content with mere surmises. She

liked a difficult, a delicate task, — the feeling tentatively for the *corde sensible*, that sensitive nerve of resentment or bitterness which should put her on the right track, — and was quite herself again when, on the way to dinner, Schonberg felt for the first time in many a year the presence of a white hand on the sleeve of the black coat which fitted him so awkwardly.

They returned to the terrace, after dinner was over, where Gladys devoted herself assiduously to her work, but without detriment to the conversation; while Mab, fishing over the balcony with a worsted skein, which Jack had attached to his cane, contributed a domestic coloring to the scene.

"Do you like America, Dr. Schonberg?"

"I have lived here a good many years," said he.

"You ought to be a good judge, then."

"Ashurst does not furnish a very broad basis for an estimate," he replied.

"It 's a very good sample," said Gladys, holding up the skeins and matching her colors. "Places may differ a great deal in a country, like a patch-quilt; but the general effect of one corner is the same as that of any other. Besides, to stay in one place is not necessarily to like it, Dr. Schonberg."

"I stay here because I wish to," he remarked laconically.

"I had a delightful visit from Miss Fleming and her sister," continued Gladys, sliding from one topic to another. "There is something very *distinguée* about Miss Fleming."

What Gladys meant was quite true. Seraphine had more presence than Elize, a something marking her off from the myriads one meets in life; so many rustling leaves swept by on the wind. But Gladys' adjective, as one belonging to the world of fashion and manners, made Schonberg wince, and he never could beat the cover of conversation without starting the game.

"Pardon me," said he; "souls have distinction, but are not *distinguées*."

"Has she not a good deal of pride?" asked Gladys, smiling. "Pride, you know, is worldly?"

"Since the ark," answered Schonberg, "everything goes in pairs. There is the pride of self love, and that of self-respect."

Gladys lifted her eyes and inspected his half-averted face with the frankness of Mabel.

"At all events she is very attractive, and I wish to know her. Is it so very hard?"

He did not like to discuss Seraphine, especially after the incident of the morning, which seemed to him to be connected in some indefinable way with the conversation. "Women are not very easy to understand," he said evasively.

"No," said Gladys, "we are not so naïve as you are; or perhaps," she added, with a quick glance, "you think nothing can be made out of nothing."

"That 's what Lear said to the fool," answered Schonberg, amused at the swift flow of her thoughts.

"I forgot there was a fool in Lear," replied Gladys meditatively, lifting her blue eyes.

"Necessarily. Without fools there would be no tragedies."

"Do you think so?" and a malicious light filtered through her lashes. "Fools and women, you mean."

"They are not of one sex, the fools," he said, crossing one leg over the other.

"First sex, then fools, and last, tragedy; is that the logical order? I should put love for sex," she continued, unraveling a fresh skein, "it 's more comprehensive. Love gives the lie to the proverb, does n't it? There is one fire the burnt child does not dread." And Gladys resumed her long stitches.

"Do you never smoke after dinner, Dr. Schonberg?"

"To smoke I must have my pipe, and my pipe is in the pocket of my dressing-gown," said Schonberg, feeling instinctively in those of his dress coat.

"But I can give you one of Jack's — a new one." And Gladys laid aside her work. "Will you come?" she said, leading the way to the library. Here Schonberg forgot even his pipe. "They belonged to my father," said Gladys. "They are not arranged yet. Here are Fromaget and Locke elbowing each other."

"Do you ever read them?" asked Schonberg.

"Sometimes," said Gladys, laughing. "They are not altogether ornamental. I am afraid you haven't a very high opinion of my sex."

"Why not?" said he, turning and looking at her.

"Possibly because we like Fromaget's imagination better than Locke's understanding. But we have an understanding. Once in a while we even reason a little."

"Oh, faster than we do," said he.

"But" —

"But not so far."

"The hare and the tortoise! I believe I shall finish by becoming a disciple of Locke," she said, running her hand over the shelf, and bringing the books into line. "All our knowledge comes from experience; the trouble is, we women never profit by it. We leave the reins to impulse, after you have given them to reason. Would you like to examine me in Locke? Come, begin."

Schonberg was penetrative, but he had not yet classified Gladys. A deeper riddle might have been more easily solved. Each furnished the other a new sensation. She could not embarrass him, while he, on the other hand, made her feel like a novice in an art in which she was accustomed to consider herself proficient. For to Schonberg conversation was a real and serious business, and no art at all. Rugged and direct, his simplicity went straight through the guard of Gladys' society weapon. He ignored all the rules of the game. She was a good fencer, and enjoyed the science of attack and defense, the flash and ring of the steel; and in society, where the foils wear buttons, that is everything. One does not go into a parlor to draw blood, unless with a stiletto, tipped with poison, in the sleeve. Not that Schonberg was sanguinary. He was only serious, intent upon the theme, and forgetful of the speaker. Gladys added to her conversation an element of personality, sparingly, as one uses a strong condiment, but as a necessary ingredient without which it lost all its zest. Whereas for Schonberg neither he nor you counted for anything. He neither wished to please nor to wound. It was a new experience for Gladys to be taken at her word. But she was not wanting in tact, and finding she could not fence with one who does not know

how, she sheathed her weapon and faced her adversary with a pair of innocent blue eyes. If they could not embarrass, they could mystify; for they changed like summer skies, and to look into them was like looking upon a landscape bathed in mist, which confuses the perspective and gives objects uncertain proportions. Their spell did not act at a distance, the flame was more bright than warm; but in their presence they possessed a nameless influence which disarmed reserve, and in which, as in a cup of wine, constraint and coldness were dissolved away.

"I should like very much to examine this library," Schonberg said in reply, his eyes wandering over the shelves again.

"You like books better than people."

"They are easier to get along with," said Schonberg, taking down a volume. "A book can retain what it holds. No one is obliged to read a poor one; but it is sometimes difficult to shake off a fool."

"How different we are," said Gladys, sitting down and looking at him thoughtfully. "It 's just the reverse with me, I have n't the least difficulty with the fools — but there are books I cannot shake off at all."

"What ones?" asked he, taking out his glasses.

"Ah, you cannot tell, Sir Tortoise. I know yours without asking."

"If you know my books, you know me," he replied, looking from the open page over his spectacles dubiously.

"Of course," laughed Gladys, "and *vice versa*. But the variety is so great" — and she glanced round the room — "that you cannot find the clue! Don't you think they ought to be arranged and catalogued? They are all in confusion now. One might at least make a picturesque effect with the bindings. But we are forgetting that pipe! Wait, I will send it to you."

As she went out the door, she turned.

"Dr. Schonberg." She had to call twice, for he was already deep among the leaves. "Confess for once," she said, "it was not so very difficult to shake off the fool." And a moment later, a servant brought him a tray on which was a pipe and some latakia, and lit the lamp, for it was beginning to grow dark.

Schonberg did not resent the personal application of his remark; first, because he knew Gladys was not serious, and then he was not quite sure to which of the two she referred.

Jack, who preferred his cigar with Mabel to the exertion of conversation, was somewhat surprised at Gladys' reappearance on the terrace

LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY

alone. He had listened with interest to her efforts to entertain her guest, and, recalling her assumption of the role of Providence, remarked, as she came out the library door, —

"You 've caught a Tartar this time, have n't you, Gladys?"

"I have introduced him to his best friends," she replied carelessly.

"Oh, you can manage him if any one can," said he. He had great confidence in her methods. He never felt aggrieved at her usurpation of attention or responsibility in this direction, for not every one could claim the one with less arrogance, or exercise the other with more discretion. She had a talent for bringing together those ripe for each other, and of making her guests forget all sense of duty. Jack had not forgotten an evening at the minister's, where every one had been changed round at definite intervals for the apparently sole purpose of being kept busy. "It was like playing dominoes without matching," Gladys had remarked on the way home.

"It is Miss Mabel's bed-time," said a voice from the door.

"Mabel, do you hear?" said Gladys.

Mabel, hooking tulip heads over the balcony with her impromptu line, abandoned her occupation reluctantly, and after having indulged in

such specious delays as she deemed prudent, as a last resort asked if she might go and say good-night to Schonberg.

"Yes, go."

Jack put on his hat and walked towards the steps.

"Where are you going, Jack?" asked Gladys.

"I promised Rowan I would call this evening." He lingered a moment on the stairs as if expecting she would say something. But she did not speak. "Can I do anything for you?"

"No," she said, turning away.

Children! she thought, as she passed and repassed the library door. The dream was different from the reality. There had been no fear, no humiliation, in the dream; for a dream like hers, indulged in between two strokes of her ivory brush, dallied with between two stitches of her loitering needle, could be banished with a frown or a sigh when conscience awoke. And Gladys had a conscience, although often not aware of it till, like the magnetic needle above the ore, it swerved under the attraction of self interest. She was explaining the matter to it now as she walked to and fro, and she found it easier to treat with conscience than with pride; for conscience can be argued with and diverted, but pride is consoled for its humiliations only by

forgetting them. As if conscience could dictate to the heart! its whips might scourge, but they could not kill. Conscience! Gladys loved authority, but despised law. If there was a task to be performed, she would do it of her own free will, not under the goad of duty. A task! the tide of her indignation turned against herself. What was she thinking of? Love? She, Gladys Temple? Though the night was cool and fresh, she grew hot as she walked the terrace under the summer stars, for the fight is only a vain beating of the air when one will not recognize the enemy, and pride persisted in throwing the blame upon circumstances. After all, what had happened? Nothing, nothing, nothing, she repeated obstinately, shutting her eyes.

The sound of Mabel's voice came through the open door.

Schonberg had not heard the patter of feet running over the terrace, nor seen the little figure with its dress full of tulips till it stood before him in the red light of the lamp.

"I 'm going to bed," said Mabel, depositing her tulips on his open book and standing on tiptoe to be kissed.

"Are you?" said Schonberg. "Well, goodnight, little girl;" and he lifted her to his lips.

"Are you going to sleep here?" inquired Mabel.

"No," said he, smiling, and realizing for the first time that he had been very much at home.

"Aren't you afraid of witches?" pursued Mab earnestly.

"Witches? What are they?"

"They live in the dark, and eat people up," said Mabel in a confidential whisper calculated to inspire terror.

"If that 's the case I had best be going," said Schonberg, kissing once more the small witch before him and folding his glasses in their case. As he rose from his chair he saw Gladys, immobile, in the doorway. The light from within shone full on her face. It was flushed, and betrayed anxiety. It was not the same woman that had left him a half hour ago. He had only seen her twice before; but the one brief meeting of their eyes at Rowan's that morning, when he turned from Seraphine's picture, came back to him now.

"Mabel has been warning me of dangers which beset my way home," said he.

Gladys laughed nervously. "Dangers?"

"Yes, witches," he replied, looking at her intently.

"You should have told her they were all burned long ago," she said. Her eyes avoided his, and a thought, like a flash from a night cloud, so rapid that what is seen is only a ghost

of a landscape lingering in the darkness, shot through his mind. They crossed the terrace silently, with that uneasiness which succeeds the sudden consciousness of mutual comprehension. I am worse than Mabel with her witches, thought he. Why not? said another voice; the fireflies on the lawn can attract your attention, and the thoughts of a feverish brain close beside you emit no light!

He put out his large warm hand to say good-night.

"It 's a night for dreams," she said, lingering at the steps.

"Dreams!" said he; "beware of them. Between dreaming and living there is a gulf fixed."

Then she heard the grinding of his cane on the gravel.

XXI.

While Schonberg was reading that evening in Gladys' library, Seraphine made him a present in this wise.

She and Elize were sitting together on the porch when Rowan came up the walk.

"Is Miss Fleming at home?" he asked, recognizing Elize by the light from the window.

Seraphine rose from the shadow, and Elize

presented him. It was not wholly because Rowan had asked only for her sister that Elize walked down to the gate, loitering between it and The Towers with the thought of Schonberg's half-promised visit in mind. Nor was it altogether because of her natural delicacy. She felt a strange timidity. Nothing troubled Elize so much as a mystery, because — well, the most casual observer could have told why. Those scarlet flushes which waxed and waned like the glow of the auroral light under the pale olive of her cheek, those clear gray eyes into which the dark lashes were ever throwing shadows, told all her secrets.

"Miss Fleming," began Rowan, "I have come to offer you an apology." She was still standing, and he saw by her face, on which the light from within fell, that she knew nothing. "After meeting you in the woods the other day, I went home and painted you as I first saw you. My cousin, Mrs. Temple, has accidentally seen this picture; I say accidentally, — I mean I was not present when she discovered it, nor when it was shown to your sister and Dr. Schonberg, who happened also to be there. I am not such a sophist, Miss Fleming, as to attribute the" — he sought for a better word, but could not find it — "the unpleasant position in which you are placed to my cousin's curiosity. The fault lies

behind that, and is mine. Nor am I willing to excuse that fault by saying, what is not true, that in painting that picture I was doing only what artists claim the right to."

Seraphine made a movement.

"The more I have thought of it, the more I have dreaded to come and say this," pursued Rowan, "and the more clearly I felt I ought to — because" — He hesitated a moment, breaking off a cluster of the blue berries which hung from the woodbine about the porch.

"Why do you go so deeply into the reasons?" said Seraphine.

He looked up quickly. It was the first time he had heard her voice. There was in it the faintest tremor, but when he searched her eyes he could not tell whether his reasons had troubled her or were indifferent to her.

"You are right," he said. "Every word I say only adds to my offense. But, thus far, Miss Fleming, — have I your pardon?"

"You have been very frank," said Seraphine. "For that I thank you, Mr. Ferguson."

There was an afterthought in her words which he imagined he divined.

"I have not asked you what I should do with it," he said; "but — if it would save you the embarrassment of deciding — I will keep it."

"No," said Seraphine, smiling, "you will give

it to my uncle, Dr. Schonberg." This solution did not please him, and he could not avoid showing it. "And you will do so because I ask you," added Seraphine.

He was silent for a moment; then, looking into her face again, "An artist's work is dear to him, Miss Fleming."

"Do you wish me to command you, Mr. Ferguson?"

"No," he replied eagerly, "you are right, and I will do what you have — asked, may I say — not commanded?"

There was a troubled look in her eyes worth more to him than words. She had taken her seat again in the shadow. He had nothing more to say that he dared to, yet he hesitated.

"Good-night, Miss Fleming."

"Good-night, Mr. Ferguson," — and, as he turned, "thank you."

At the gate he met Elize, who gave him an inquiring glance in the dusk.

"I am afraid I have tried the patience of a saint," said he.

"You ought to be more considerate of saints," replied Elize, "you who paint them."

Soon after Rowan had left, a soft rain began to fall. Seraphine had gone to her room. Elize lingered at the door, though she no longer expected Schonberg. The leaves glistened in the

light streaming from the windows, the rain gurgled in the eaves. She felt a loneliness she could not explain; there was, in her heart, all the difference between her morning walk in the sun amid the songs of the robins in the hazels, and this slow rain falling out of the mysterious night. She closed the door, put out the candles, and went up stairs. It was not the rain on the roof that kept her awake that night.

"Seraphine," she whispered.

"What is it, Elize?"

She hardly knew how to begin. That which troubled her meant nothing or everything. It was the first time they two had ever gone to sleep together without that hour's talk which begins when the candles are lighted on the dressing-table; when the heart shares the abandon of the body and opens its doors, as those flowers which open only at night and yield their perfume only in the light of the stars. But it was no longer the picture standing in Rowan's room which troubled her — it was Seraphine herself. Why? She did not know, except that she lay so quietly beside her. If she had moved — certainly she was not yet asleep — and Elize began to wonder. The rain continued softly but persistently; the great drops swelled and fell from overhanging boughs on the roof; the wind sighed in the chimney. Her thoughts came as

the rain and the wind came, in gusts, a broken chain of images, now distinct, now dissolved in unconsciousness; she began to dream. She was searching — searching for that little rivulet she heard, but which hid in the tall grass and daisies. She listened; yes, it was there, trickling on — somewhere, close under her feet — but she could not find it; then the murmur became a roar. Hark! it was like the sea. She woke with a start. The wind was sighing at the windows, and the raindrops trickling on the roof. She had been dreaming. She put out her hand and felt for Seraphine's; it did not move. She crept closer, till her cheek touched her shoulder; she was asleep. How warm the shelter of that room was — how sweet the touch of that form! How foolish she had been! Seraphine had no secrets from her. And once more, in the murmur of the rain and the night wind, she fell asleep.

But not Seraphine — wide awake, with Elize's hand in hers. There are seeds which, from the time they first fall into the heart, we know will come to maturity.

A ray of yellow light from thirty million leagues away crosses the horizon line. The leaden sea sparkles, the sterile rock grows warm, the shut flowers open. The first arrow from the

quiver of the sun! cries the Poet. The scientist laughs. Your metaphor, he says, is at fault; the emissive theory was long ago disproved; it is a vibration. Bah! says the Philosopher, a vibration in a vacuum! No, that is impossible. In a rare material medium, then? No, friction is inadmissible. In what, then? Ether. And ether, what is that? An imponderable fluid. And this imponderable fluid, since it is not matter, what is it? The Scientist hesitates, and the Poet laughs. My friend, says the Philosopher, I have a brain, whence spring ideas, complex, mysteriously combined — but how? Consciousness notes only the result, the process is unknown.

And I, cried the Poet, have a heart, whence springs love — love, frailer than beauty, stronger than sin. How? I will explain it all to you, when you have told me how the shaft from the sun's quiver fell this morning into the sea!

XXII.

Gladys was supposed to have been kindly treated by fortune. It had surrounded her with an atmosphere which resolved such of the crude realities of life as succeeded in penetrating it into a soft illusion of spectrum-like colors. It

had favored her, too, with a happy, contented disposition. She accepted life as she found it. It was not altogether satisfactory: her love for laces, for example, could never be satisfied; then, too, a complexion was a great care and source of anxiety; — there was also her Aunt Isabel. Still, on the whole, it was a very agreeable gift; and while aware that there were probably greater evils than even Aunt Isabel in store for her, she enjoyed her immunity from them as she never could have done had she realized how complete it was. Poverty? There was undoubtedly such a thing. She had even imagined what she would do under a reverse of fortune. She would wear a very neat, close-fitting calico dress, with a narrow white collar, and take in sewing. Further than this she ceased to plan for what was, after all, a remote contingency. Suffering? Gladys had not thought herself especially exempted. She had a great many worries; she had to grow old like other people, and die like them. Passions? She did not believe very much in the passions, which were not associated in her mind with well-bred people. Besides, they hastened the flight of every pleasure, sapped every throne, and furrowed the face with wrinkles; of which Gladys thought more than of the fiery track they plough in the heart. She had read a great deal, and very judiciously. Novels, to be sure,

abounded in passion, and novels were very entertaining; she liked nothing better than a good one, in a pleasant room before a cosy fire. But novels were fiction. No one had ever thrown himself at her feet with the threat of suicide in reserve, no one had ever languished and died because of her caprices; and she was heartily glad of it. If Gladys estimated the passions lightly, it must be remembered all our judgments are fettered by first impressions, and that hers had been derived from society, under whose forces the heart receives a surface polish whose sparkle prevents one from seeing far within it. She loved Jack — certainly she did; Jack was very thoughtful and indulgent. Once, when in Homburg with her aunt, an old nobleman had sued for her hand, and Aunt Isabel had advised her to accept him. But Gladys, who was very young then, had promptly refused; at which her aunt told her she was a little fool. Not a few younger lovers had subsequently sued for her heart, but with so little success that her aunt finally remarked, with even more warmth than before, that she had not a particle of blood in her veins, and was as destitute of feeling as a fish. Still later, she had met her cousin Rowan. He was very different from the thoroughly crystallized people she had known in society, for society, when it forms a character, hardens it;

and yet, to her surprise, he proved less tractable than they. First amused, then attracted, she was finally piqued. Exactly what passed between them was not known even to Aunt Isabel, who was dumbfounded when her niece announced her intention to marry Jack. This done, perhaps Gladys imagined life was exhausted, and that she could predict every day that was left. Certainly it was with no little surprise, as well as uneasiness, that she felt the flame beneath the sparkle. So there were giants nowadays after all, and the passions she had seen as so many twinkling stars, like those which glittered above her as she listened to Schonberg's retreating footsteps, were titanic forces lodged in her own heart.

She walked down the lawn through the trees which masked the road, absorbed in her thoughts, but with that same need of movement, of occupation, which had possessed her all the day. A torturing sense of duality tormented her, as if two implacable enemies, imprisoned within, were struggling for her ear. Rowan had been rude and she had been indignant, that was all. Perhaps jealousy outlives love; but did he imagine for a moment — And her pride swooped like a falcon on its prey. How absurd, to fall in love with a woman he had never spoken to! And what right had he to come back now; she was

happy . . . perfectly happy. Once . . . Oh, if once . . . and her thought soared as the lark soars above the morning fog, beating the mist of the meadow under its wing. Her life seemed suddenly to have been so paltry . . . without even illusions . . . happiness missed, missed, not lost! . . . and she, fooled to sleep with trifles when there were forces stalking like giants through the land and she was of their race. To live . . . to love . . . the thought filled her with a joyous sense of power, — power to suffer and endure; she was glad, glad to the verge of fear. A new exhilaration quickened her step, the very earth throbbed warm under her foot, and the trees . . . hark! were they whispering together of her? She hurried out of their shadows into the open space by the gate. Love! she said to herself disdainfully, while a bitter sentiment of reproach drove out the momentary joy; he cared nothing for her — he might even come to hate her; and her eyes flashed in the light flickering from the gas jet above the gate.

She would go and meet Jack; her heart warmed suddenly towards Jack.

The clouds had shut out the stars, and a drop of rain fell on her cheek. She stopped at the corner of the lane, and listened. What could keep Jack so long? They could find nothing to talk about; he knew nothing about painting,

and Rowan cared nothing for stocks. A fresh breeze stirred the tops of the trees and dropped from branch to branch. She would wait no longer; it might be hours before Jack came back. She would go home, to bed, to sleep . . . but not to dream.

She hurried back, seeking the shelter of the trees to escape the random drops, though the darkness terrified her. But once in her room, she found this darkness pleasant, and sat for a long time by the window watching the clouds sliding over the stars, till nothing was visible but the distant glare of the lights of Ashurst, reflected in a gray mist of rain.

She would light the candles and finish her book.

It was one in which she had been exceedingly interested, but it appeared to her now very commonplace. Its characters were so many puppets, making set speeches and walking about like Nuremberg toys. Why did they not do something! What did all these grooves and wheels amount to! A drop of freezing water, a little vapor caught in a rock, were mightier than they. The book was stupid — she would go to bed.

But in sleep all the sentinels of reason nodded at their posts, and imagination, the reveler, put on his cap and bells. He swept away the silken hangings of Gladys' bed, and hung a great world

there — a cold, dead world, solitary and still, in an empty space. The gilt night-clock was ticking on the dressing table; she could hear the beat of the dead world's heart — louder, louder, till its mountains trembled and fire shone in the seams of its barren rocks. "My dear," said this world, suddenly, in an ironical voice which so resembled her aunt's that Gladys sat up in her bed, "though you are cold as a fish, your passions will some day ruin you."

When Gladys woke again the sun was streaming in the window. How pleasant those first waking moments were, when the thoughts that had troubled her sleep were dissolving in this strong bright sun, and she realized they were only vanishing fancies and dreams. Life glittered again like the river she saw from her window as she threw wide open the blinds. Her senses drank in the sparkle of the water, the songs of the birds, the fragrance of the earth refreshed by the night rain. This was the reality.

She was so contented and happy that she felt the need of speaking to some one, and smiled at her own blue eyes in the glass. Even Aunt Isabel seemed attractive, and Gladys knocked at her door as she finished the last button of her morning dress on the way down to breakfast. Her aunt was already in her chair; Gladys did not remember ever to have seen her in bed. She

proposed they should take a ride, — "it was so beautiful after the rain. I will order the horses at once, and we will start immediately after breakfast."

"Here is your letter, Gladys," said her aunt, taking a paper from the table as she was leaving.

"It is of no consequence," she replied, throwing it into the basket.

Aunt Isabel appeared as the carriage rounded the terrace corner; punctuality was one of her virtues. There were traces of beauty on her face, to say nothing of that beauty which is neither created nor destroyed by the imagination, — character; traces too of the coquette, though the pleasure of adding that touch of art which no wealth of resources need despise had long since lapsed into the duty of making the best of such as were left. Gladys was somewhat afraid of her. Her wit had grown caustic with age, and bit hard. But Gladys was not always worsted. She remembered the encounter of Richard's sword with Saladin's cushion, and opposed an unresisting good nature, an innocent laugh, to the wiry edge of her aunt's attack. She had learned, too, that when she had a really good opportunity to retort, she won respect by availing herself of it. Nothing so pleased Aunt Isabel, strange to say, as to be fairly beaten by

Gladys; it was the son outdoing the father. Once, when Gladys told her that having failed to set a good example in her youth she consoled herself by framing admirable maxims in her old age, Aunt Isabel gave way to a fit of genuine laughter.

She was at heart very fond of Gladys, above all, because she had never to forgive her for being stupid; and this morning, Gladys being especially in vein, the old lady lay back against her cushion with half-closed eyes, listening to her account of Ashurst and its people. Gladys possessed the art of graphic narration and description, and could draw one of those pictures which leave a perfectly definite image on the mind although we cannot remember its details. She had found at the breakfast table a note from Jack to the effect that he and Rowan were off for a day's shooting. Without any well-defined purpose she turned the horses' heads away from the village into the woodland roads. On the whole she was rather glad to be relieved from her sitting that day.

Passing through a strip of woods which followed a brook down from the hills, they overtook Seraphine. She was sitting on one of the side logs which guarded the bridge, resting. Gladys' recognition was accompanied by one of her brightest smiles, but the one she received in return seemed to her even brighter.

"Gladys, who was that young girl on the bridge?" asked her aunt some time after.

"Miss Fleming."

"You have not told me about her."

Gladys told what she knew, adding: "You must ask Rowan if you wish to know more."

"Ho, ho!" said Aunt Isabel to herself with a sharp glance at Gladys.

"Do you think she is pretty?" the latter asked carelessly.

"Decidedly; there is no question about it. She reminds me very much of the Countess Foy."

Gladys smiled. Her aunt never forgot a name or a face, and these reminiscences of days before Gladys was born, to which she was not infrequently obliged to listen, were not very interesting to her. "I suppose she was a very remarkable woman," she said, with a touch of malice.

"Very," replied her aunt. "She had an impetuous heart which she knew how to govern."

Gladys shrugged her shoulders and took up the whip. She was a little irritated; a small black speck had appeared on her day's horizon. "I think Miss Fleming is striking; I don't know that I should call her very beautiful."

"Beauty, my dear, has no degree. It differs in kind," said Aunt Isabel.

"I don't admire that kind, then," remarked Gladys.

"You would not have us all alike, child! There would be no love if there were no variety."

"No, nor any inconstancy," retorted Gladys.

"Inconstancy!" exclaimed Aunt Isabel; "you don't even know what it is."

Gladys lifted her brows in a way peculiar to her, and replaced the whip in the socket.

"This Dr. Schonberg," said her aunt on the homeward way, "interests me. He must be quite an original. Invite him to lunch with us, since we are to be alone. There is yet time," she said, looking at her watch.

"But he dined with me last night. I cannot invite him again"—

"Present him my compliments, Gladys."

"Why not to-morrow?"

"No one knows what may happen to-morrow. Drive home quickly, I will send him a note myself."

"I do not think he would come if he knew it was simply to amuse you," objected Gladys.

"In the first place, my dear, he will not know it, and in the second place we will amuse each other."

So the note was written and despatched. It piqued somewhat Gladys' curiosity, and con-

tained a sentence which excited that of Schonberg, who appeared at one o'clock on the terrace where Aunt Isabel, engaged in her favorite pastime, a game of solitaire, awaited him.

"This is Dr. Schonberg?" she said, laying down her cards. "Have the goodness to take this chair beside me, and to excuse an old lady who has left but one of her sex's privileges, to ask favors."

He bowed and took the seat offered him.

"Do you play at solitaire, Dr. Schonberg?"

"To tell the truth, madame, I have played nothing else all my life."

She smiled a little, fixing her bright penetrating eyes upon his face, and went straight to her point.

"While driving, this morning, I met Miss Fleming."

Schonberg deposited his hat on the floor beside his chair, and listened attentively.

"One is astonished to see any young people at all nowadays, in our country villages; they hurry away from them as the brooks do from their hills. It surprises me she is altogether content to remain here, — for she is content, is she not?"

At a loss what to think of this question, Schonberg betrayed a movement of surprise.

"Ashurst, to be sure, is a delightful spot for

children, including those of our age," continued Aunt Isabel, taking up her cards again, "but it is only a pond, there is no current."

"There are eddies innumerable," interjected Schonberg.

"Therefore you and I sink to the bottom," said Aunt Isabel, searching for the knave of hearts; "but do you think Miss Fleming will imitate our example?"

Schonberg followed the movement of the cards in silence, till having completed her game the old lady leaned back in her chair and fixed her bright eyes upon him again.

"Miss Fleming recalled to my mind, this morning, a very dear friend, the Countess Foy. She has been dead, it is true, these many years, still I remember her. And I also remember a beautiful child who caused her much concern. Was not her name Madelon? I thought so. I often heard of her from her mother, with whom I corresponded till her death, and know very well the story of her marriage. To-day, when I heard the name of Fleming, I said to myself, this is my friend's granddaughter."

"It is true," said Schonberg.

"You will pardon me, then, if I take some interest in her. I wish to see her."

"Certainly."

"I am so old I am only an inhabitant, but

Miss Fleming can be a neighbor, if it be not too late."

"Too late?" said Schonberg, not understanding her.

"I mean before she leaves us."

"But we have no intention of leaving."

"Oh, that is incredible."

"Your friend did not tell you" —he began.

"On the contrary, she told me everything. He was a precious fool, the grandfather, I assure you."

"If he is a fool," said Schonberg, not noticing her use of the past tense, "so much the worse for us. Fools never repent."

"So much the worse for him, then," said Aunt Isabel tranquilly, "for he is now dead."

"Dead?" exclaimed Schonberg, rising to his feet.

"Well!" cried the old lady, like Frederick to his soldiers, "what did he wish—to live forever?"

Here Gladys appeared. Lunch was ready.

At lunch Gladys did not exert herself as usual. Schonberg was preoccupied, and her aunt had a satisfied air which above all things always exasperated Gladys. She was conscious of intruding upon them, and it occurred to her at the same time that Jack had made his plans for the day very abruptly, and that Rowan had disposed

of her sitting rather summarily. She was vexed with herself for feeling aggrieved at such trifles, but the black spot on the morning's horizon had grown larger; she saw continually Seraphine, smiling. To her thinking lunch dragged along so mournfully that she excused herself before it was over. It was not of her planning, and she washed her hands of all responsibility for its stupidity.

"You must have expected this," said Aunt Isabel when they were alone, resuming the conversation where it had been interrupted.

"But not in this way. It must have been very sudden."

"Very," she replied. "My letter was one of gossip, which travels faster than business. Moreover, it was from Vienna, where the Count died. They are searching for the heiress, and I wish to see her; you will be carrying her off now. Promise to bring her to me. Poor child! how long she has waited."

"She has not been waiting," said Schonberg.

Aunt Isabel looked up over her sherry. "You do not mean that she does not know."

"She knows everything."

"And she has never talked to you about it?"

"What was there to talk of?" asked Schonberg.

"Humph!" muttered the old lady, moving

her arm-chair into the sun and her glass to the corner of the table beside her.

Schonberg, too, was thinking. So it had come at last; the happy monotonous years were over. He lived them again as he sat watching the sunshine quivering on the surface of the wine. He would give all he possessed for the happiness of those he loved. All he possessed! Then love was his all — yes, even that.

What did he expect? The brook from the hills lingers a moment in the pool at their base, and hurries on. Had he thought to limit lives just begun by his own that was finished? He had foreseen all this from the first. He thought of his morning visit at Rowan's. The scenes were shifting, new actors were coming on the stage. But we are never ready for these transitions, and when they come they are always the sudden storm prepared mysteriously out of a blue sky. He tore himself with a wrench from his thoughts, and looked across the table where the old lady sat in the sun. She was asleep, her hand on the table, holding her glass. He made a movement, but she did not stir. He rose and walked to the window opening on the terrace; Aunt Isabel's afternoon nap was not so easily disturbed. He took his hat from the chair outside — no one was in sight — and walked down the steps.

Gladys, passing by the window shortly after, looked in and saw her aunt, still asleep. The rustle of her dress as she entered, however, awoke her.

"You must have amused each other famously," said Gladys.

XXIII.

Meanwhile Seraphine continued her walk.

She had turned aside from the road to follow the brook up the hills. Wherever she paused the miniature valley opened an enticing vista full of lights and sounds. The little falls of water beyond called to her, "Come up hither where we are." There were nooks of shade where flowers whose time was past were blooming still, — haunts of the moss and fern; and spots of sunshine where danced myriad flecks of insect wings. She fixed upon more than one distant landmark as her goal: a black log under which the water rumbled; a great tree at whose roots it toiled; a ledge over which it spread and gathered, to leap through a spray-band of color into a pool. And still the waters above called, "Come up hither, follow my voice and you cannot lose the way."

She loved the woods and everything in them. The spider was safe there to float his silken

threads from the tips of the ferns; the red squirrel waited till her foot was on his fallen trunk, and the wild pigeon called its mate from the tree against whose rough bark she leaned. She had resolved not to go beyond this tree; still she lingered, loath to turn back.

Suddenly her ear caught a sound of breaking branches and crushed leaves. Something was moving through the undergrowth above the open space where she stood. Her heart beat fast, though she knew there was nothing in the woods of Ashurst to frighten a child. She could follow the sounds through the thicket of leaves as they grew more distinct; she could see now the tops of the young trees swaying as they were pushed aside. Just then, with a whirr that made her heart leap to her throat, a startled partridge took wing from the hemlock cover, and lit with a crash in the tree above her head. Almost at the same instant a man broke through the thicket and paused on its edge, listening. It was Rowan.

The squirrel leaped to a higher limb, the call of the pigeon ceased; nothing was heard but the gurgle of the brook.

He advanced slowly, his gun in his hand, choosing every stepping-place among the dry leaves and dead branches, and scanning every tree. She was in full sight, yet he did not see her. Cautiously creeping from moss to stone,

alert, breathless, he drew near. Once he stopped to shield his eyes from the sun and search a great hemlock between them. She turned her head slowly, little by little, upward where the bird was watching the hunter with its restless, anxious eye. He was within a hundred feet of them now; he stopped again and raised his gun.

"Mr. Ferguson," said Seraphine, "the bird has taken shelter in my tree."

"Miss Fleming!"

She stood just across the brook against the brown trunk of the pine from which the bird, startled afresh, took wing, masking its flight behind the thick branches.

"Confess that I frightened you," she said, smiling, but trembling.

The sound of her voice in the still wood had indeed startled him, yet it seemed natural to him that she should be there. He had been thinking of her all the day.

"Do you wonder?" he said, coming to the edge of the stream. "I thought you were miles away."

The color overspread her face. "I ought to be," she said. "I shall be late, and Elize will not know what to think. This little brook enticed me."

He did not ask if he might go back with her; he even forgot Jaek, and they walked along the

banks together, the talking water between. A strange happiness was taking possession of her heart. It came in like a flood tide, till it filled and overflowed. She struggled against it, as against rising tears. A high rock barred the way below; she was obliged to cross the brook, and her bunch of wood flowers fell from her hand. "Never mind," she said. But he rescued them all from the rapids, between the glistening stones, and the eddies above the sands at the bottom shining with a thousand fiery eyes. As he gave them back to her their hands touched. Surely the way to the heart does not lie through the senses, and what matters it if the way to the senses lies through the heart?

It was a long walk to the bridge, and they talked — of nothing — nothing — that nothing beside which all else is a shadow, an echo, and a dream.

XXIV.

On his return from The Towers, Schonberg, prompt in action, though without method, sat down at his desk and wrote the notary at Dinant, with whom, from time to time, he had corresponded in relation to the affairs of Madelon and her children. His mind worked fast, and his thought traveled far; details escaped him easily.

One central fact filled the whole range of his vision, a new life opened before him; "for the former things are passed away." A long file of memories came back to him. Elize would not run again to his arms with the news of the robin's eggs hatched over night, nor Seraphine sit on his knee listening to his stories. "The lights He created for seasons, and for days, and years;" but when we look up, the season is past, the days finished, and the years set below an ever-advancing horizon.

His letter finished, he carried it himself to the office, and, taking the road to the bridge, came back through the fields by the river. On reaching the tea-house he took his pipe from his pocket, filling it mechanically, his eyes on the distant shore. A dumb hostility against events, — all this chaos of experience we call growth, progress, discipline, — against the old Count, who in passing away, and Rowan, who in coming upon the scene, opened for those he loved this new life, independent of him, and into which he could not enter. "It is in the nature of things," he muttered, half aloud, pressing the tobacco into the bowl; "they are not the cause, only the signal;" and looking about for some stray consolation, he remembered that he was approaching dangerously near to that period of life when we must become a burden upon those dear to us,

and that separation would spare him this, which of all things he detested. For separation it must be; if not now, then soon. True, it was not in this acre of Ashurst that his roots were so deep; but habit and the necessities of his own being had gotten the upper hand. He looked about him helplessly, as the plover in the morning fog seeks for its nest. He saw Seraphine and Elize already at Walzins. "I must tell her to-night," he thought, fumbling in his pocket for a match. He was late to his dinner that afternoon. Deborah's patience evaporated with the soup, simmering an hour over time on the range. But her frowns did not trouble him. Nothing so makes us forget our small trials as a greater one; and while she was serving him in a silence more condemning than words, he was thinking how he should tell Seraphine that evening, and wondering whether she had anything to tell him. Did she love Rowan? The thought hurt him, for we cannot love without forsaking, more and more, kindred and friends. Then the face of Gladys appeared to him. Her nimble imagination and quick taste interested him, and the thought that had possessed him on the terrace the night before came back with its prophecy of unknown evil, causing him to think of Seraphine with a new tenderness. The shelter of his own arm might yet be necessary to her. What a wizard

love is, touching this one to regenerate, and another to lay moral sense in ruins. "Bah!" he exclaimed, rising from the table. "Mabel with her witches is not more foolish than I." Yet he could not altogether rid himself of his forebodings; the heart is a sure prophet.

In the study he found Seraphine's picture. Confronting him unexpectedly as it did when he opened the door, it seemed the confirmation of his thoughts. He took the candle from the table, and approaching the portrait held the light above his head. What strange tricks memory plays with our eyes! For the woods on the Lesse are like those of Ashurst, and, as he gazed, through their dark lanes came Noël. The black trunks soared like the pillars of an aisle. In the flickering flame that fell upon them, he saw the stalls under the windows, the leaning pulpit and stairs, and, standing out from the luminous shadows, the cross above the altar, at whose foot was stretched a bier.

He replaced the candle on the table and went out the door.

The moon had risen, and every leaf stood clear cut against a white sky. The air was warm, but the oppressiveness of the day was gone. The shadows of the trees looked not so cool as the whitened fields on which they fell. It was a night when Nature, putting aside her robes of

mist, steps forth unveiled, like a chaste Diana, in the light of the moon.

For a long time he walked the path, back and forth, under the sentinel maples which lined the road, his long garment flapping at his heels. At the hedge of hawthorn in front of the Flemings' he stopped to listen. A strain of music came through the open window, and he recognized the touch of Seraphine. She seemed to be searching for something in a wilderness of sounds, — such sounds as the wind calls from the harp, the vague unrhythmed measures which set revery in motion. Among these sounds vibrated at intervals a note like a human voice, then others answered it; gradually these notes fell into the cadence of a periodic movement, and at last united in melody. He seemed to be listening to the birth of a song.

Then the sounds ceased. After waiting a moment he went in. Seraphine was alone in the sitting-room, sewing.

"Where is Elize?" he asked, looking about the room.

"She has just gone to her chamber," replied Seraphine, glancing at the clock ticking on the shelf over the fireplace. He followed her eyes; it was later than he had thought. He crossed the room to the hearthstone, where two tall andirons caught the light on their polished balls,

and stood with his back towards them, as if it were not broad midsummer.

"And Miss Leigh?"

Seraphine looked up and smiled. "She has gone too."

Miss Leigh was an aunt of Harold's who had lived with his children since Madelon's death. It was not strange that Seraphine smiled, for Miss Leigh always disappeared when a visitor came, even Schonberg. She seemed the shadow of a human being, with her pale face and white hair; like those white ferns of winter which the frosts have blanched, and which wave without rustling over the snow under which their companions lie buried.

Seraphine, looking up from her work, saw Schonberg's eyes fixed upon her in silence, and thought of what Elize had once said to him: "You have two kinds of silence; one says, 'Take care, go no further!' the other would extract from me my secret of secrets."

"You have nothing to tell me, Seraphine?" he asked at last.

"Great Pan is dead," she said, smiling again.

"But I have something to tell you."

Seraphine went on with her sewing.

"And you are not curious?"

"No, Bluebeard, I am not curious, since you give me no key."

"Some one has presented me with a portrait," he said, after another interval of silence, approaching his subject indirectly, through another.

"Yes, I know." And Seraphine bent lower over her work.

"It has led me to think," he continued. "I had forgotten; it seems only yesterday that you were a little girl. But in reality it was long ago."

"Yes, in one way it was long ago. One forgets, when one year is so like another."

He looked at her thoughtfully. For a moment the desire to defer his announcement mastered him; it might not be true, and in that case — "Come," he said, with a sudden tenderness and relief, "you are tired; follow the example of Elize."

"Elize was sleepy, I am tired; there is a great difference. Are you never tired of . . . being tired? Do you never want . . . change . . . anything but sleep?" And she lifted her eyes, in which he saw a signal-light to his.

"You have been sewing too long. Come, go to bed," he repeated.

"No, I had rather talk with you."

"With me?"

"Yes, with you. What do you suppose I am doing here, alone . . . sewing?" And, laying

down her work, she leaned back in her chair. "No, I do not sew . . . I think. I am going to tell you, for I am tired of telling the trees, — they do not listen; nor the brook which runs away, nor the river asleep, — they talk, but they do not hear. After all," she added, taking up her work again, "I do not think, I dream. I believe I am a little homesick."

Her voice struck to his heart. Dreams? They are the whisperings of the heart that wakes, and asks if, of all the passers-by, none seeks for it; the yearnings of the young bird, on the edge of the nest, for the spaces of air and the scorching sun. He knew; and he followed her words, as step by step one follows at twilight footprints made at morn.

"Of what do you dream, Seraphine?"

"Of so many things. Of Dinant," — he crossed his hands behind him with a motion of surprise, recalling suddenly the forgotten secret of Elize, — "with its white houses between the river and the rock. The chimes of the tower wake me at night. I see the lights on the bridge, and hear the rumble of the wagons. When Elize is asleep, I climb there above the red roofs, in the shining powder of the rocks between the walls that buttress the vines. Mother used to tell me of it, and every scene grew vivid as she talked with me, like old pictures

retouched, till I remembered every day of the summer we spent there. I can hear the very tinkle of Father Gudin's spoon in his tumbler of sugar and water, and the rush of the stream under the wheel in the meadow; and see the great pike the gardener stirred from their sleep in the lilies to please me. Once it was all like a story I had read; now it is a life I have lived. Of what else shall I think? Ah, yes, yes!" she said, divining the thought which troubled his face, "we are happy here. It is only I . . . if I did not dream!

"Do you remember the picture of the chateau that used to hang there where you stand, and . . . after father died . . . over mother's bed? She loved it, but I — I have put it away. And that other, of the cottage on the dunes where I was born. There is no grass so sweet to me as that strong yellow spear that keeps away the sea, and holds in its grasp the sliding sands. Oh, that sea!" and her eyes began to shine. "I hear it most of all. There were days when I loved it, — you remember them, — when it kissed my feet and played with my houses of sand, curling about their foundations, or breaking with a laugh in little waves over their walls; and days when I feared it, yet was proud of its strength, as though it were my own; when I danced in the wind along the dunes, and we

shouted together alone, it and I; when the fisher-women, holding me fast, pushed their nets before them, and I felt its cool clasp about my waist. How we laughed and chatted, with the salt, yellow flower of the sands wreathed in our hair, — we were free, then, they and I, like our great sea. And at night I hear it — the roar of the sea — chiding, in its deep voice, or, growing angry, with bursts of thunder above the wind, till I sit up in bed, wide awake, beside Elize, listening, as if some one called. I cannot help it; it is in the blood; you do not know; I was born there, in its arms."

Schonberg had not moved.

"The sea, and the fields," he said, when her voice ceased, "they are the same everywhere — here as there."

But as he spoke his thought was of the Lesse flowing through the fields of Freyr.

"No, you do not believe it," said Seraphine. "The fields and the sea, they are nothing; but associations" —

"Yes, yes," he interrupted, "they are the native air."

She went on, looking at him from the recess of the old chintz-covered chair, framed in by its high square sides like the face of a child in the white cap of some grandam.

"Then the long journey we made. I remem-

ber it, but as a dream ; all its scenes are so vivid, yet so confused : the cliffs in the north, covered with sombre pines ; the city, with lights and flowers, and a sharp-roofed chamber under the tiles ; long days on the floating river boats ; then a great blue sea and a tent under palms. How can I help thinking of these things ? They come and go, like waves rising and falling, first pleasure and then pain. If I could only see Dinant once more, and the black cottage on the dunes ! Perhaps it does not stand there any longer ; perhaps the sea has crept under it at last, as it threatened to do when I lay awake, listening. It seems as if to look once would satisfy me. But now, all these memories fill me with longing and desire ; they are the breath of the roses I cannot reach coming up from my window wall."

Her voice trembled, and she went to the window. Shading his eyes with his hand, Schonberg sat down in her chair.

" Think, uncle," she said, after a moment of silence, " think how long we have lived here ; count them, the years, one like the other as the trees in the hedges." She moved the footstool towards him and sat down at his feet. " Whom shall I tell, if not you ? It is so hard to repress, to feign."

" Yes, it shortens life," said he.

"Why should we not go; and you with us? When I think of Dinant and the sea, I feel as I used to when a child; when I read 'Once upon a time there was a prince' . . . Come!" she exclaimed, stealing his hand, "take us, Elize and I."

There was no day he did not think of Dinant, but to see it again! It was strange he had not thought of that, and his heart thrilled as the heart of the ruler when the Master said to the dead, "I say unto thee, Arise!"

"You are not angry with me, uncle?"

"I, angry? No. I have something to tell you."

"I knew it," she said. "Why do you not speak; I am not a child."

"You wish to see Dinant, again," said he, speaking slowly; "well, you can. Your grandfather is dead, and you are the Countess Foy."

Seraphine rose to her feet. For a moment the large room that had always been so attractive seemed all too small to breathe in, and her quiet life charged with power. Had she not been saving money these two months to buy the golden pin which Elize wished for her hair? Had she not been dreaming as the bird, safe from the hawk in its cage, dreams of the wood glens? And now, wealth, freedom, home, Dinant, and the sea! She stood a moment breath-

less, crossed the room and came back again to his chair, then went out quickly upon the porch into the friendly solitude which emotion loves.

The night was still. Only the plaintive note of the wood thrush was heard in the far woods. Above, a flock of little clouds floated noiselessly up to the moon, where they vanished in thin veils of mist.

She could not have told how long she had been there when Schonberg came out, his cane in his hand.

"Good-night," he said. There was a look on his face which reproached her. Elize would have thrown her arms about his neck.

"And your hat, uncle?"

"Did I wear it? I forgot," said he, going back for it.

"But, uncle, you have not kissed me," said Seraphine, as he started again towards the gate.

He turned with a gesture of impatience, touching her cheek with his short grizzled moustache. She took his hands, intercepting his retreat.

"Are you endeavoring already to forget Seraphine Fleming to go in search of the Countess Foy?" said she. "I warn you beforehand you will not find her."

Straight as the yellow grass of the dunes she stood before him, love in her voice and eyes. But the remembrance of another night came

back to him; a night when he ran down the road to Anseremme crying Noël! Noël!

"It is a little sudden, for both of us; but I am glad," he said. She slipped her arm through his, and they walked together down the path. "It is a great relief to me." He was poor at disguises. "You will go back to Dinant now. There will be no more worry for the future;" and he began to relate in a very matter-of-fact way how the news had reached him. Seraphine smiled, pressing his arm closer. And, constrained by her silence, he went on. He had written to Dinant; doubtless they would hear from there soon; any day might bring a letter. And then, nothing would prevent their immediate return; they were rich now; this was no place for them! And reaching his gate he kissed her again. "Run back and tell Elize," he said gayly; "she will forgive you for waking her."

"You do not offer to show me your present," said Seraphine.

"You have not seen it?" he replied with surprise. "Come."

He pushed open the study door, and Seraphine went in. The figure on the canvas seemed advancing to meet her out of the forest, out of the shadows into the sunlight on the edge of the wood; and her heart cried, "It is I! It

is I!" Its beatings frightened her. A thousand thoughts gathered there against her will, — a troop of fluttering doves thronging the doors of the dovecote to take possession of a home long prepared; a thousand longings, hidden there like the young larks in the meadows, trembled to take wing; but above all, the consciousness of power, — power to suffer and compel, to triumph and defy.

Something of what was passing in her mind, Schonberg knew. A sudden shyness caused him to turn his back, and lighting his pipe at the candle flame, he went out on the porch. She joined him presently, left a kiss on his forehead, but before he could rise to go home with her was gone once more into the friendly shelter of solitude and night.

He listened to her footsteps growing fainter on the walk. The light in her chamber shone awhile through the trees, then went out. He watched the place where it had vanished as one watches a rift in the clouds behind which a star disappears; then, thrusting his pipe into the pocket which, with time, had extended itself to the border of his yellow gown, went in and closed the door.

XXV.

Aunt Isabel's news was confirmed the next day by a letter leading to a family council in the tea-house, a council resulting in the determination to set out at the earliest possible moment for Dinant. Schonberg was to accompany them, while Miss Leigh, not one to endure transplanting, was to remain in the Ashurst home. Her permanent settlement in the old house was the suggestion of Elize, who, in spite of the parable of the widow's mite, experienced a new-found pleasure in forming munificent and vast designs. She laughed at the idea of Schonberg's return to Ashurst when once The Snuggery should be forsaken. He doubted it himself, while resisting, with the acquired instinct of prudence, her more enthusiastic plans for an immediate and final migration.

He had related to Seraphine his interview with Aunt Isabel, telling her of the latter's desire to see her: and it was Seraphine herself who proposed they should make the visit that afternoon. They were met on the terrace by Gladys, who in person conducted Seraphine to her aunt's chamber, and who, before opening the door, had quietly weighed her guest in those delicate balances society furnishes its members.

Seraphine was looking unusually well that afternoon, — so well that Gladys, on her way down the stairs to rejoin Schonberg, paused a moment before the mirror to receive back the answer which angered the Queen in the Russian fable.

Left to himself, Schonberg had found under the shade of an elm a seat which he preferred to the chairs on the terrace. Just above him a small brook, drawn out of its channel to furnish a little music for Gladys' shrubberies, had broken away from its artificial bed, spreading itself noiselessly through the grass, whose myriad blades sent a ripple of shimmering light up the slope.

Discovering his retreat, Gladys took her parasol and joined him.

She had herself been sitting there that afternoon, whose hours had hung heavily. After lunch she had shut herself in her room to imitate Aunt Isabel's example; but sleep had not come, though the air was drowsy. She had taken her embroidery out under the awning, but the pastime had become a task, and was soon abandoned. She had loitered a half hour in the library, turning over leaves which failed to interest her; to take refuge finally with Aunt Isabel, whose quick eye had noted her restlessness, and who had lent her a book, with which she

had retreated to the seat under the elm. This book, of a class her aunt sometimes affected, proved to be one of those unanswerable homilies on the conduct of life whose logic is irresistible because, as in a mathematical theory, all uncertain factors which might disturb the conclusions are excluded from the premises. Having pillaged the last chapter, Gladys had thrown it aside with a contemptuous smile. This moral multiplication table did not furnish her the products she was looking for; besides, there was a robin in the elm branches overhead, whose persistent liquid note of happiness irritated her. It was very harassing to her, who usually kept her objective point so steadily in view, not to know her own mind. Her will, which had always run so smoothly in its channel, had suddenly divided, and, like a river lost in the numberless ways of a marshy level, hesitated where to gather again. We defer a decision, because to decide is to accept consequences and assume responsibilities; meanwhile irresolution creates heavier burdens.

On his return from shooting, Jack had told her Rowan expected her that morning; and she had not gone. She was vexed now at having stayed away. The appearance of visitors had been a relief. She was curious to see Seraphine again, partly because of her history, which

she had heard from Aunt Isabel, and partly — Nor was she sorry to see Schonberg, who, since that night on the terrace, exercised over her an attraction mingled with dread. She took her seat a little behind him, where she could watch his face, wavering between the impulse to surrender to the influence she felt in his presence and the resolve of her pride to rebel. In this state of indecision chance took the reins again out of her hands; for his face, deep in thought, which even her approach had not apparently disturbed, was like a still lake, into which she could not resist the temptation of throwing a stone.

"Shall you return to France with Miss Fleming?" she hazarded.

"Why do you make plans for us?" he replied.

Gladys colored, though he was not looking at her.

"It is like a page from the Arabian Nights," she continued, "to wake so, in a moment, to wealth and power and — love! Why not say it?" she pursued, with a smile on her mouth but malice in her voice. "Is it not so? Nothing in all the world so stares one in the eyes as a pair of lovers."

"Why speak of it at all, since it does not concern us?" said Schonberg, dryly.

"Me, no; but you. Do you think I am in-

dulging my imagination? You are mistaken. My cousin himself has told me. One must have a confidante, you know."

"Your cousin does not know the proverb, then," said he.

"What one?"

"'Thy friend has a friend, and thy friend's friend has a friend; be discreet.'"

She laughed frankly; and then, seriously, "I should be glad to think you were my friend."

Leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, drawing figures with his cane on the gravel, Schonberg made no reply to this proposition, and Gladys returned to her subject. "Perhaps you have other plans for Miss Fleming now. It does concern me a little, after all; Rowan is my cousin, you know."

"Plans! what plans?" said he, looking at her.

"More ambitious ones."

He shrugged his shoulders, and resumed his tracing.

"Oh, you disdain ambition?"

"No, I fear it."

"You!" exclaimed Gladys, opening her eyes incredulously.

"Yes, for others. Ambition only discloses one's riches or poverty. We project ourselves into everything. Wealth, power, solitude, love,

— they are all treasures or trifles. What we have is always what we are."

"You should not include love in your catalogue, Dr. Schonberg. Friendship, yes, for in friendship one gives what one has; but in love the values are fictitious, and imagination fixes the price."

He made no answer, and she went on, half in earnest, half in jest. Gladys loved to hover about the border line of seriousness.

"You did not respond to my desire to have you for a friend. According to your theory of projection, you could not be a loser, and I might gain a great deal."

Schonberg looked at her again. "The foundation of friendship is sincerity."

"But not too much," said Gladys.

An interval of silence followed, during which he watched the ants running excitedly about the ruins made by his cane.

"What is it that troubles you, my child?" he said suddenly, turning towards her.

She had not expected such a question, but a kindness had stolen unawares into his voice, — and it is pleasant sometimes even to be called a child.

"Troubles me?" she stammered. "What troubles any one? Circumstances — fate" —

"So!" said Schonberg, "they terrify you?

Listen. I once knew a child born in the street Misery, in the city of Poverty. His eyes opened upon the implacable duel between want and famine. His earliest recollection was of a long December night, long and cold, during which he listened to the difficult breathing of a woman, dying. It was his mother. She had taken his hand at dusk. She had not told him, yet he knew that this consoled her. In an hour she was a nothing — a mere pair of lungs struggling for breath, two eyes that stared and saw nothing, a muscle contracting about his hand and holding him fast. And he — well, at last he fell asleep! And when he woke it was morning; the lungs were still, the eyes fixed, and the muscle a vise. This child was a bundle of nerves, capable of enduring hunger, but trembling at a reproach. Yet amid the filth of that street with its narrow strip of murky sky overhead, that child dreamed — saw what it had never seen, peaceful fields and a blue heaven. In the brutal pressure of life these dreams went up like the perfume of a flower growing in the dark. What was circumstance to him! Some one will say," he continued, "that an ancestor transmitted to this child in the one ten-billionth of a grain all this power to survive the ferocious enmity of circumstances, and to draw from those very nerves which trembled floods of vague

hope and wild courage; and that this ancestor did not originate this grain of power any more than did the child to whom he transmitted it. Fate! well, be it so. But fate is not all — nature is not so niggardly. What! she steeps the world in power from crust to centre, and leaves the heart a beggar, to pick up stray crumbs from an ancestor's table! Search, dig, — you will find it more plentiful than the coal in the rocks."

Overcome as by a flood from a great reservoir that had burst upon her little world and swept it from its foundations, Gladys could not speak. His words had brushed away her defenses like cobwebs.

"Phrases! words!" said he, getting up from his seat and sitting down again. "Who would imagine they had such power; that a single one, fate, for example, — four little letters, — could put so mighty a thing as conscience to sleep? And circumstances! there is a fine one — an allopathic dose that will still conscience like a drop of poison."

"Dr. Schonberg," exclaimed Gladys, rising abruptly and confronting him with a face white with fear and passion, "are you giving me advice?"

"Advice?" he replied, looking straight into her eyes, "what are you resolved upon?"

"Resolved upon?" she repeated, confusedly.

"Yes, resolved upon. When one's mind is made up, one looks about for advice — wind to the ship making port! It matters little which way it blows."

"Well, and suppose I wished for it," a feeling of recklessness getting possession of her, "I know beforehand what you would say. Duty! a little word with four letters; what power these little words have! One has only to say 'duty' to a struggling wretch to fill one's heart with complacency. And 'struggle,'" she continued with mocking passion, "there is another fine one. Struggle? One does not struggle with a babbling brook, and with a torrent one cannot. See that ant which fights with the end of your stick."

She stopped. Seraphine was coming down the terrace steps. The breeze slid from leaf to leaf, dropped on the grass like a cloud's shadow, and vanished. The water shimmered down the slope beside them to the stones, whence came soft hollow noises like the notes of certain wood birds.

"Cannot? how do you know?" asked Schonberg.

"By hearsay," replied Gladys coldly. She was watching Seraphine, who, not seeing them, began to walk down the lawn towards the gate.

"Fate," said he, taking her hand in his some-

what rude fashion of greeting, "since you believe in it, has perhaps thrown us together. Pardon me, I am an old man, will you come and see me?" She had regained possession of herself, but his warm hand caused her to tremble. "Certainly I should have said duty, if you had not said it yourself; we cannot get away from it; we are tied to it with a rope, and the rope will not break, even in the torrent. Duty, and resignation, and the approval of self — there is nothing else."

"Where did you come from?" said Seraphine, who on hearing his footstep had turned, and stood swinging the tip of her parasol through the grass.

XXVI.

Left rather abruptly within Aunt Isabel's door, Seraphine had hesitated for a moment under the old lady's silent survey. Her first thought, on seeing the face which interrogated hers so silently, was that it had once been beautiful; and it seemed to her at that moment that *it has been* were sadder words than *it might have been.*

"So you are the daughter of Madelon Foy. Bless me! she was younger than you are when

I last saw her. You do not look a bit like her."

"My mother was beautiful," said Seraphine.

"So was your grandmother, and you are the image of her," rejoined Aunt Isabel, taking the reluctant hand. "You do not remember her?"

"No," replied Seraphine, sitting down.

"You are very kind to come and see me. Between us, love is a very one-sided affair. Nonsense, child," she exclaimed, answering Seraphine's eyes; "why should you pretend to love an old woman whom you have never seen? You see, my dear, we old people remind you of nothing, while you children remind us of everything."

"I am not altogether a child," said Seraphine.

"Nor I an old woman. We both amuse ourselves with words. The truth is, we are children till our hearts are broken. What are you going to do now? Go back to France? Ah, I see; we have been dreaming of it already."

"Is it strange? I remember Dinant well."

"Yes, but Dinant is a dismal place, — I passed a summer there with your grandmother, — more dismal than Ashurst, even. Do you expect to spend your life in an old dungeon on the top of a rock?"

"You had my grandmother. I shall have Elize and my uncle," replied Seraphine.

Aunt Isabel drew the young girl towards her and kissed her cheek.

"Yes, my dear; and the fat carp in the ponds. You will have a famous time! You will show your satins to the sheep, and dazzle the bourgeois with the Foy diamonds."

Seraphine smiled in spite of herself.

"I did not expect to find you so large. I had in mind a little girl, — quite a little girl. Time passes so quickly;" and the old lady sighed. "At all events, the old fool is dead!" she added, energetically.

"Do you mean my grandfather?"

"Certainly, your grandfather. You need not blush for him, my dear. One fool in the family! it is nothing. But tell me about your mother." And in answer to Aunt Isabel's questions, Seraphine told the simple story of Madelon's life in Ashurst.

"Poor mother!" said the old lady. "What agony to leave you."

"I do not think mother was sorry to die," said Seraphine, quietly. "She could not bear to think of leaving Elize. We used to talk a great deal together after Elize was put to bed. Once, when I could not help crying, she took my head in her hands and said, 'You must not cry. When the heart is sure that it has exhausted everything, it is ready to sleep.'"

"What does that mean?" asked Aunt Isabel, looking at Seraphine with a kind of wonder.

"She meant that she had loved, and been loved," said Seraphine, simply.

The old lady turned away her eyes, which seemed to follow her thought into some far away place.

A knock at the door roused her.

"What is it, Jane?" she asked.

"Madam wished me to read her letters to her" —

"Presently, not now. I will ring. You must bring Elize also to see me, my dear," she said to Seraphine, taking up the letters lying on the table.

"If you wished — if you would allow me" — said Seraphine, looking at the letters.

"Allow you! with all my heart. Ah, here is one from my good friend Savary," she exclaimed, glancing at the superscriptions. "Draw your chair near me."

"I will sit down here, if you please," said Seraphine, moving the footstool beside her.

She took her seat, and beginning to open the letters, felt a hand pass over her hair and rest upon her shoulder.

"You are a good girl," Aunt Isabel was saying to herself.

Seraphine unfolded the first of the pile lying in her lap, and commenced to read in a voice which trembled a little.

"Never mind that one," interrupted Aunt Isabel. "It is to tell me that rents are falling."

Seraphine laid it upon the table and took up another.

"No, nor that one either. It is from my doctor, and I know what he will say. Poor man! he is at his wit's end. He wishes me to drag myself to some spring, where they sell the elixir of life by the glass. Ah, at last!" she exclaimed, as Seraphine took up a letter postmarked *Evian;* "that will tell us something about our good-for-nothing Rowan."

A faint color stole into Seraphine's face.

"*Ma chère amie*," she faltered.

"Wait, my dear; I must tell you. Monsieur Savary is a very old friend," — the old lady sighed, — "and when I say very old I mean very good; it is the same thing. He has had the kindness to watch a little for me over my nephew. Now begin; let us hear what he has to say."

"My dear friend," resumed Seraphine, grateful for this moment of recovery, "I deny myself even the pleasure of presenting my respects and inquiring after your health, to inform you at once of the reasons you ask for your nephew's departure for his native land. *Ma foi*, my dear friend, they are very simple, but like some simple things they are very difficult to explain.

Without doubt you know this dear nephew better than I, who have seen him only from time to time; nevertheless you will permit me to enter into certain details which appear to me necessary, in order that you should understand what has taken place."

"I think I ought not to read this letter," said Seraphine, looking up from the page.

"Do you know my nephew?" asked Aunt Isabel.

"I may," replied Seraphine, letting her eyes fall again.

"Continue," said the old lady, pressing her shoulder gently. "When you reach anything which I think you should not hear, I will warn you."

Seraphine bent her head over the letter and began to read again.

"It is not agreeable to be repulsed by fortune. In affairs of the heart the evil is not so great; it wounds the vanity, on the other hand one preserves one's illusions. But in the serious business of life it impairs the courage, and without courage the will becomes only a desire. I make no pretensions to understand your sex, but I affirm that life assumes in our eyes more naturally its true meaning; we perceive more clearly that it is a task, not a dream — not even a pleasure. Herein also lies our advantage. For you,

the greatest of misfortunes is to be too early disillusioned; for us, after the Isles of the Blessed sink from sight there remains the ocean of activity. Ask yourself then, my dear friend, if a dream which cannot be realized is for you so terrible, what must be for us a task which cannot be accomplished.

"I remember well the impression which your nephew first made upon me; a nature which the practical young men of to-day disdain. So much the worse for them! There are weaknesses easy to ridicule but difficult to reproach. It was evident to me that he had not received an education requisite for success. Ah, when I remember the black coat with its rose in the buttonhole in which I received my diploma, tied in a white ribbon! I, who could write verses in the style of Horace or satires in the style of Juvenal, and who was delivered over to the world by my worthy teachers as the Athenians sent their virgins to the Minotaur, decorated with garlands! Surely, of all the sciences whose progress we boast, education is the rear guard. This is inevitable. How reconcile the external conditions of man's existence with his destiny! Rowan is the embodiment of this antithesis. Never have I seen one in whom the gifts of nature struggled so constantly with those of experience.

"But you will ask me, why this failure? It

seems to me failure is so common that it does not merit an explanation, and that but for the love which you entertain for your nephew, explanation would be unnecessary. And then, in matters of Art, I know so little. However, let us try. You will say that he loves his profession — granted; that he has a lively imagination — I admit it; and to this he owes a facility of composition which is marvelous, not to speak of his coloring, which, when he deigns to color, is as light as a poet's rhythm. Why then, you ask, why then is it that with so much enthusiasm, such conscientious study, such seriousness inspired by such ambition, the public — that good public we love and fear so well — will have none of him? Because he ignores this excellent public altogether. I assure you I know no more of Art than the painter of signs. I do not judge, I explain. But who would give to a young man about to enter a salon the advice, 'Respect no foibles and combat every opinion?' It is the same in this great social organism, life. I do not say that your nephew attacks; he does what for him is worse — he ignores. Of what use is it to paint Madonnas which no one buys? I had a chat not long since with his master, who, by the way, has the medal of honor. "Much talent, but a dreamer; he will accomplish nothing." That was his verdict. Assuredly all the great

leaders from Plato to Napoleon have been dreamers. But, madame, there are no longer any leaders, and of what use is it to lead where no one follows! This is the age of ideas, but every one has his own; there are no more masters, no great rivalries, only jealousies; no great schools, no systems. There are those who rejoice in this democracy, in these terrible agencies which in lifting everything level everything. For me it is a chaos, a period of transition, in whose feverish heat every egg of theory hatches and none live.

"I have above my desk a canvas which Rowan gave to me on parting. It is the figure of the Virgin standing by the infant Christ asleep. I cannot convey to you the expression of that mother, whose ears seem to hear the wings of protecting angels, yet whose eyes also seem to see the last great scene of the Cross. And over all a softness of touch, an indecision of outline — one would say the mist of incense ascending before the lights of the altar.

"As I look I hear the words of the master to whom I showed it, 'The artist can no longer consecrate himself to religious symbolism. The age in which we live demands realities, not emblems.'

"'And the *renaissance?*' I asked.

"'A *renaissance*,' he replied, 'is a souvenir. The past is but the *point d'appui*, the source

of inspiration. Remember the words of Goethe: 'If you wish to be great, fill your mind and heart with the thoughts and sentiments of the age in which you live. These pictures,' he continued, looking at the canvas, 'have the merit only of an echo. They are the reflection of a mysticism at which we wonder, but in which we no longer believe. The fault of your *protégé* is that, in reproducing this mysticism, he has also the misfortune to believe in it.'

"'What a paradox!' I answered. 'The spirit of the age — realism!'

"Doubtless, my dear friend, this learned man who has the medal of honor is right, for the time being. We have yet to see whether in this vaunted realism we are to find the new strength which the earth gave to the fainting Antæus. As for me, I verily believe that if Goethe were alive to-day he would reject his own advice, and at such a price renounce greatness, though it courted him with the tongue of Sappho. Realism forsooth! I much prefer that of Louis XV. to ours, for the former at least was brilliant, lively, delicate, and rose into the region of the imagination; but to-day spirituality disappears behind formulæ. You see at last I am growing old, since I sermonize and grumble.

"You have asked me why Rowan returns to Ashurst. Well, I have said it, — failure. Yes,

failure. But do not imagine that you are to find in him one of the dejected or cynical products of this age of competition. For these romanticists — what do they care for failure? They suffer most, and are the worst of optimists; they bleed so easily, but who ever saw one die? The suffering which engulfs us is a spring-board from which they vault into the empyrean. Say to your nephew 'failure,' and he will laugh in your face. No, it is only a pecuniary pressure, to which we must surrender though we despise it, that leads your nephew to abandon Paris. That legacy which his mother left him yields, I think, next to nothing; his painting nothing at all. The world laughs at a fool who will not stoop to pick up flattery and florins. But I have a lurking respect for fools. To despise money is to despise a king, to listen to flattery is to mortgage one's worth to one's enemy. Still, I repeat, your nephew does not roll in gold, and I say this to you lest you should not discover it."

"Humph!" interjected Aunt Isabel.

"Perhaps also at night he mistakes sometimes the roar of the wheels for the murmur of the fine rain on the roof of his chamber in Ashurst.

"And now to answer your last question. No, absolutely No! I, who know so well, alas! the

symptoms of this malady, declare it to you. This seems impossible to you, my dear friend, who, pardon me, have seen so many at your feet. Nevertheless, it is true. And in place of such tragedies as I might have to relate to you, there is only this idyl which will explain the check I inclose with this letter.

"I called at his rooms to attend to certain matters remaining after his departure. While there I heard a timid knock, and opening the door I saw a young girl, modestly clad in a gray dress" —

"Continue," said Aunt Isabel.

"She was confused at seeing me, and remained without saying a word. 'What do you desire, Mademoiselle?' I asked. 'Monsieur' — she said, and her eyes wandered about the apartment which was vacant. 'Is gone,' I replied. 'Ah!' she murmured. 'You desire to see him?' 'Yes.' 'But he is gone.' Still she made no motion to go. 'Well,' said I, ill at ease, 'what service can I render you?' She hesitated a moment. 'You know him?' at length she asked. I assured her I knew him well. She then drew from her pocket a small purse, her fingers trembled, and took from it five bills of one hundred francs each. 'I wish to give him these,' she continued; 'you will send them to him?' 'Assuredly,' I replied,

'but from whom?' A blush covered her face, and she bent her head. 'He will know; say for me, please, God does not forget a good action.' 'It seems that you do not forget one either,' I replied. 'Adieu, Monsieur,' she said hurriedly.

"I inquired of the *concierge* — nothing; he had never seen her before.

"Often in my thoughts I have seen this young girl again; an ordinary face, but with sweet eyes and a charming air of modesty. Her dress was scrupulously neat, but poor; one does not ordinarily see bank notes of one hundred francs in the pockets of such a dress.

"Draw from this what you will. To me it is evident that there is for your nephew something in life which he has not yet experienced.

"My letter is finished. I write to you from Evian, where I am passing a few weeks for my health. You remember this town, bordering the lake in whose blue depths the mountains are mirrored. The swallows glide above it, grazing the surface with their wings; and as I lay down my pen I confess that it also has but touched the surface. Below, lie the images of the mountains in the deeps of the lake."

"Is that all?" asked Aunt Isabel, as Seraphine finished. "Think of it," taking the

letter over the latter's shoulder, "so many fine phrases to tell us that our nephew is a good-for-nothing!" Seraphine straightened herself up as if about to reply. "Yes, a good-for-nothing!" reiterated the old lady. "And to think of what he might accomplish if" — She finished her sentence with a gesture of impatience.

"If he only wished to," said Seraphine, looking up with a smile. "Shall I go on?"

"No, my dear; I will not impose on your good-nature, for I wish you to make me another visit — many — before you go."

She went to the window after Seraphine had left her, and watched her cross the lawn till the trees hid her from view. "Why not?" she muttered to herself, going back to her chair. And taking out her writing materials from the desk beside her, she began a reply to the letter which had so much interested her, in which, among others, was this sentence: —

"Write me, I beg of you, the next time, a letter of gossip. I am in my second childhood, and thinking is more tiresome than living.

"By the way, I have found here the daughter of that little runaway, Madelon Foy, — think of it! — and it is possible she will find for our nephew that 'something in life which he has not yet experienced.'"

XXVII.

For several days Gladys had put off her visit to Rowan's; but Jack, having seen the sketch of her slender form in the high-backed chair, was interested in its completion.

"I don't want to drive you, Gladys, but I wish you would finish it."

"Yes, certainly," she said; and she sent a note to Rowan that evening making an appointment for the following day. Was she afraid to go? Without answering this question, she said to herself she did not care. There was nothing to choose, no alternative she herself did not create; she had only to forget and ignore.

In the early morning, after breakfast, she put on her shade-hat and wandered down towards the boat-house. There was yet an hour before it was time to go; but this hour seemed now all too short, and she realized that not choosing was making up one's mind.

All the way across the lawn she felt the presence of that necessity which dogs the footsteps of free-agency, — it was not that she might, but *must* choose. Oh, if we could only sleep, stop time, flinch the laws of growth, and lock the wheels of action! But love and life, the necessities of the heart and the necessities of action

mock at neutrality, and wring a decision from us every day.

She had passed the boat-house mechanically, and her hand was on the gate leading to the pines. In the summer-house beyond she saw Schonberg. He was that child! she was sure of it. What a glimpse of power he had shown her. What! a child despise fate, and not she? She had read stories quite as startling before, — just as she had looked a thousand times at the night sky without once seeing the flaming suns which inhabit it; just as she had looked a thousand times into her own heart without feeling that sense of power which rose to her brain like the perfume of the flower of which Schonberg had spoken. What forces there were under the filigree lace and satin skin of life! The stars obeyed them — but she was free! She passed through the gate into the meadow, where the freshness of morning still lingered. Love? Well, yes, she said defiantly, half closing her eyes; was she responsible for it? There was a kind of pleasure in recognizing it, in order to strangle it, in indulging this dream, in order to overwhelm it with its own folly and humiliation.

Approaching the point, she heard the sound of Schonberg's voice; he was reading aloud. She advanced softly over the pine needles, un-

perceived. His back was towards her, but his voice could be heard distinctly; and, leaning against the trunk of a tree, she listened: —

> "Why, if the soul can fling the dust aside,
> And naked on the air of heaven ride,
> Were 't not a shame, were 't not a shame for him
> In this clay carcase crippled to abide?"

He paused, looking off on the river. She started at his movement, and a dry twig snapped under her foot.

"So you were listening," said he, turning with surprise to see Gladys standing hesitatingly where Mabel had accosted him. Her face was fresh and fair as the river sparkling before them, but her eye was anxious, and her step restless.

"I am trespassing," she forced herself to say.

"Oh, no," replied Schonberg; "what I own here is not what you have come to enjoy. That is only to sleep in," he said, with a gesture towards the house. "This is where I live."

He made room for her beside him, as if to say she was welcome, and she took the offered seat without a word, like a fascinated bird. A thin veil of vapor lay on the river, through which the trees appeared dimly, like the walls and towers of a city extending along the farther shore. Gladys felt the necessity of saying something, but could find nothing. She was thinking of

what he had dared say to her, and at this thought the seeds of revolt stirred in her heart. And yet, looking from the river to his rugged face, though it wore the serenity of a child, Gladys, so in the habit of bending others to her will in her indirect and subtle manner, felt that he could break her like a twig and wind her like a reed about his finger.

"You will miss this spot when you go," she said. "You will have nothing to do."

Schonberg smiled. "You think I do nothing because I sit here alone. There is a hive of workers over there," he said with a look towards the spires of Ashurst; "and of all they accomplish nothing remains but the good or evil they do to each other. Read the great philosophers in your library; those of them who do not get lost on the way all meet again at one fork in the road, whose sign-post you and I, who stay at home, can read as well as they — good and evil."

"Good?" said Gladys, as if she herself were hesitating before that sign-post. "What is the good?"

"It is very lucky you are not obliged to wait for me to tell you! Do you remember the reply of the sage when asked, 'What is beauty?' 'Question of a blind man.'"

"You laugh at the philosophers," said Gladys, sustaining his gaze resolutely; "I supposed you were one."

"Oh," he replied laughing, "I have an argument which will pin every one of my beliefs to the wall like a butterfly, and when I give them an airing they consume each other like the kine of Pharaoh. I do not like inconsistency any more than you do, but there are two kinds: that of the fanatic who sees but one aspect of truth, and that of the neutral who sees many. Fortunately we forget our thoughts more easily than our actions; if we could read the register of the mind, no man would face judgment. And yet, after all, who needs his neighbor to tell him what is right? Our only use is to furnish each other the opportunity for a good action. Hurry, — hurry," he said, looking at her. "If the object of life is to do good, life is too short; but if knowledge, it is longer than necessary."

"Let us talk of something else," said Gladys. "I am a coward."

"What are you afraid of, — of death?" he asked kindly.

"Every one is at heart," said Gladys, seizing upon his misinterpretation of her reply to escape her own thoughts. "Did you ever think that somewhere, perhaps uncut in the mountain, but somewhere, is a stone which will stand over your grave, and want to find it, to go and look at it?" She held out her white, blue-veined hand. "See, how warm it is! Some day it will be cold, — worse."

Schonberg took the hand for a moment in his, then let it fall.

"Do you imagine that a pulse which refuses to beat, a lung which cannot breathe, a clot of blood caught in a vein, is death? It is not so simple as that. I will find it for you in the beginning of life, at the flood-tide of happiness; in the very lovers of whom we were speaking the other day. The tide rises fast for them, reaches its height, pauses, — life is then over. They refuse to believe it, — the heart is not yet full. Full? Its capacity is infinite, but the reservoirs fail. I say life is over; for happiness that is stationary, that repeats itself, is happiness no more. Having had the most, one is not content with the less, and death is in the balance of the beam. If I were a painter, like your cousin, I would paint the bird whose throat bursts with song, the butterfly fluttering in the mud, in place of a skull, a bit of bone, which the moralist puts at your elbow."

"I did not know you were such a pessimist," said Gladys, trying to smile.

"I, a pessimist?" he replied good-naturedly. "Why call names? If you only knew! I am like other people; when I was young I treasured my griefs, now I guard my pleasures."

She sat for a moment smoothing out the wrinkles of her dress over her knee, then rose with a start. The village bell was striking.

"I must go," she said.

"So soon? This is not the visit you promised me."

"Did I promise? I have an engagement."

"Oh! circumstances!" said he, a twinkle in his eye. "Come, let us drive and not be driven. Will you give us to-morrow? We will take the boat with Seraphine and Elize; there is an island below, where we will fasten and let the river go by with all our troubles."

"Really?" said Gladys.

"Absolutely. Do you accept?"

She put both her hands in his. "With all my heart."

"Good. Go to your engagement. I will consult my larder."

"Leave that to me!" she cried. "To-morrow, at what time? Nine?"

"At nine."

"I shall not fail. Till to-morrow, then."

"Till to-morrow."

XXVIII.

Gladys hastened home. She had to change her dress, and she wished to take Mabel with her. Her heart was lighter, but, as she approached Rowan's, a shadow as of something yet

below the horizon seemed to fall over her path again.

Rowan appeared to have wholly forgotten their last conversation; which annoyed Gladys, who was only making believe that she had forgotten. She was noticeably reserved and dignified, yet charming withal, as ever; for Gladys' manners were not mannerisms, and, like her dresses, were invariably worn with grace and naturalness. Even pride and anger, so reprehensible in themselves, were becoming to her, much to her disgust sometimes when she really wished to be ugly, and, as Aunt Isabel told her, only succeeded in rendering herself bewitching. To all outward appearance she was entirely at ease, but in fact was struggling hard to despise certain things in order not to despise herself.

From time to time Rowan looked up from the canvas before him to the slender figure in the black carved chair. Between the lace and the brown hair, flushed with red, was a neck soft as the swan's, and between the close sleeve and long glove an arm white as snow. But it was not of these he thought, nor her blue eyes he saw.

"I fancy talking interferes with your work."

"Not in the least," he replied, relapsing into silence.

"What have you there to read?" she asked, glancing at the book-shelf.

"Are you tired? I shall not keep you long now."

"Let me see that little red book, please. It looks tempting; red covers always are."

He took the book from the shelf, and handed it to her.

"Oh dear, poetry!" said Gladys, turning over the leaves.

"You used to be fond of poetry, cousin," said Rowan, after a pause.

But she did not hear him. Reading here and there fitfully, her eye had caught the words: —

"Love is not made of tears, nor yet of smiles;
Of quivering lips, or of enticing wiles.
Love is not tempted; he himself beguiles."

"Read me something," said Rowan. She turned the leaf hurriedly.

"Love is not made of kisses or of sighs;
Of clinging hands, or of the sorceries
And subtle witchcraft of alluring eyes.

"If we know aught of Love, how shall we dare
To say that this is Love, when well aware
That these are common things, and Love is rare?

"Love is the union into one sweet whole" —

"Well, are you not going to read?" he asked, looking up.

She closed the book quickly. "Not now," she replied with a sigh, half rising as if to go.

"Wait just a moment, please. I have almost finished."

She sank back into the chair with the book in her hand. She had forgotten her portrait. The last few minutes were longer to her than the whole hour. Mabel, having exhausted Nestor, came in and laid her head in Gladys' lap, taking the hand abandoned to her. Mabel loved its rings, especially the diamond one, playing hide-and-seek with the fires flashing from its facets. Occasionally Gladys' eyes strayed from the curly head to Rowan, absorbed in his work. It seemed to her suddenly that he looked tired and careworn. She had not noticed it before. No, Schonberg had unnerved her with his terrible words; or perhaps it was the light. Gladys had a tender vein in her composition. If Jack came back from the office with a headache, though she had on a ball dress, or were tying the ribbons of her opera cloak, she would plunge into her dressing-room, to come out in a white apron, with flannels and bottles and the business-like air of a trained nurse softened by compassion. Mabel knew how to work this vein when overtaken by childish ailments, and reckoned a sick day in bed among the favors to be desired of fortune.

When Rowan was not looking, Gladys stole thoughtful glances at him. No, it was not the light, certainly.

"There," said he, throwing down his brush, "I shall let you go now."

She rose with a start, and, putting on her hat, they went out together.

"You don't look well, Rowan," she said, as he held the gate open for her. Her voice was so kind — love is always kinder than pity — that he noticed the change in it.

"Thank you, Gladys, but I *am*, — perfectly so."

"I wish you had been willing to come with us," she said, lingering at the open gate. "This is no way for you to live." It seemed to her as if she had suddenly acquired the right to — yes, to love. For

> "Love is not made of kisses or of sighs; . . .
> Love is the union into one sweet whole."

No, not even that. He did not care for her, yet a strange happiness swelled up to her throat, the mysterious happiness of losing one's life to find it again. She did not stop to deliberate, to calculate her strength, — "great designs spring from the heart," — she simply gave herself up to the sudden rush of feeling, the sweetest and the strongest that fills the heart of woman who finds such pearls in the marvelous deeps of pain.

"I wish you would come, Rowan. I could make it so pleasant for you and — Miss Fleming."

He raised his eyes to hers, and she blushed like a child caught in a fault. "My dear Gladys," he exclaimed, taking both her hands in his with a quick movement, "I wronged you the other day; will you forget it?"

She smiled faintly, releasing her hands, while the lines repeated themselves in her ears: —

> "Love is not made of kisses or of sighs;
> Of clinging hands" —

"You make much ado about nothing. Will you come? It would give Aunt Isabel so much pleasure," she went on hurriedly. Rowan hardly recognized Gladys. *Was* it Gladys, after all? "You shall have your old room." It was hers now; but she saw herself already moving out of it. "Miss Fleming was there the other day, — calling on Aunt Isabel, I mean. You know her grandmother and Aunt Isabel were friends."

"No, I did n't know it," he said, walking on beside her down the lane.

"Why should n't you come, just for a week, till Miss Fleming goes?"

"Is Miss Fleming going away?" he asked abruptly, forgetting Gladys' entreaty.

"I think so; that is, probably;" and Gladys' throat swelled again. "Don't come any farther; I must hurry back to lunch."

"But, Gladys," said he; "wait a moment. I want to thank you." She saw he was not speaking of what he was thinking. "I cannot tell you how much I" —

"Certainly." She smiled again. "Come in this evening after dinner, and we will talk about it." She hardly knew what she was saying. "I must hurry now. Good-by."

"Bring Nestor, too!" shouted Mabel, running sidewise with her head over her shoulder. She chatted fast all the way back. Gladys said Yes and No to her questions, without hearing one of them, and when she reached her chamber threw herself upon her bed in a passion of tears. She had not foreseen the burden would press so heavily or so soon.

She did not appear at lunch; and, after it was over, Jack, who was going away that afternoon on a yachting excursion, came up to her room to make his final preparations and say good-by.

He had never been able to persuade Gladys to go with him, even for a short run down the bay. But she was always full of her own affairs, and he never doubted that she had a better time than he.

"Why don't you have some people down and fill up the house?" he said, packing his valise. "I know some who are waiting for an invitation."

"How long are you going to be away?" she replied.

"Oh, about a fortnight; but that has n't got anything to do with it."

"No," said Gladys.

"I shall start to-morrow, if there 's any wind, and drop you a line wherever I can." Jack's letters were literally "a line" inclosed between "Dear Gladys" and "Yours, Jack;" but they were longer than hers, for she never wrote at all.

"Where shall I write you, if I should wish to?"

He looked up, surprised. "Better send to the office. There 's nothing wrong, is there, Gladys?"

"No, there 's nothing wrong; I had the feeling" —

"Feeling, about what?"

"Oh, nothing," she replied, rising. "One can't always answer such a question."

"I wish you would go," said Jack. "We could take Mabel with us."

She made no reply, and went to the wardrobe for her afternoon dress.

"Do you know where my sea-coat is?" asked Jack.

"I gave it to James to brush; shall I ring for it?"

"No, never mind; I want to see James myself. I 'll be back in half a minute."

Gladys put on her dressing-sack and sat down before the mirror. She did not ring for Ellen, who was waiting as usual to dress her mistress' hair: why not, it were difficult to tell; one cannot always answer such questions. She took out the comb and pins, one by one, till her hair fell over her shoulders in brown waves tinged with a red like that of the ripe grain in the first rays of a morning sun. She was a longer time in putting it back again than Ellen required; still Jack did not come. She had changed her dress when he returned, and was deliberating before her open jewel-case.

"Halloa," he said, looking over her shoulder, and taking out a small cross of opals set with diamonds; "I don't remember that."

"Rowan gave it to me years ago," said Gladys, looking at him in the glass.

"Oh, did he?" said Jack, not observing her. "Why don't you wear it? It 's pretty. There, I believe I 'm ready. Where 's Mabel?"

Gladys rang the bell.

"Bring Mabel up here," said Jack to the nurse. He went to the window and lit a cigar with the satisfied air of a man who is ready and has a little time to spare.

Presently Mab came in like a summer storm of sunshine and rain.

"Are you going to be a good girl and take

care of Mamsey?" said Jack, lifting her up in his arms and placing her on the window casing.

"What will you bring me home?" asked Mabel, quick at seeing chances.

He kissed her with a laugh, and they all went down the stairs together. At the steps, when the valise had been placed in the carriage, Jack turned to Gladys.

"I am going to drive you down," she said.

It seemed to him she had something to say; there was a feeling of constraint new to their intercourse. But she did not speak, and gradually his thought wandered; he noticed the overhead check was too tight; an ounce more weight in the fore shoe would n't be a bad idea; and that led to the ballast of the yacht, — the sailing-master wished a part of it taken out and replaced by a lead keel; Jack himself thought there was too much of it, and too far aft — she showed her forefoot.

"What are you thinking of?" said Gladys.

"I was thinking about reballasting the Vixen. Look out!" he exclaimed as she struck the horse savagely with the whip; "he has n't been out for a day or two." What had got into Gladys?

Instead of checking his valise and going out on the platform to wait for the train, as he usually did, he remained with her in the carriage when they reached the station.

"What 's the matter, Gladys?" he asked, as the whistle sounded round the curve.

"Why do you keep asking me that question?"

"I have n't asked you before. If there were anything, of course you would tell me," he added, laying his hand on her knee.

"Of course," said Gladys.

He was about to kiss her, as usual. A kiss of that sort had never embarrassed him before. It was like shaking hands. But she made no motion, and it seemed to him that she did not wish him to. But after he had taken his seat in the train, and while lighting a fresh cigar, Gladys' averted face and eyes appeared through the smoke, and it occurred to him that he might have taken another kiss than the ceremonious one he had contemplated. "Women are so infernally contradictory," he thought, looking out of the car window.

XXIX.

Unaccustomed as Gladys was to strong feeling, she found it impossible to analyze it when it came. She swung from resolve to resolve till her mind refused to act out of sheer exhaustion, and a sort of apathy took possession of her. Riding home she drew her shawl close about her

shoulders; she was cold, though a warm wind blew from the south and the sun was shining. She stopped at Aunt Isabel's door, telling her laconically she had persuaded Rowan to spend a week at The Towers; then went to her own chamber, where she had dinner served, scarcely tasting it. She was still cold, yet the air seemed oppressive, and she sat with her shawl about her and the window wide open. Had she not expected Rowan she would have gone to bed. The light faded out of the west as she waited, alone, listening. But he did not come; the shadows deepened, and when Ellen came to say that Aunt Isabel was ready for her game of chess, she could not see her mistress in the darkness.

Next to solitaire, chess was Aunt Isabel's favorite pastime. She had taught Gladys, who detested the game, but who by dint of forced practice and the desire to beat her aunt had finally become a good player.

She roused herself with an effort, and. lighting the candles, gave a hurried glance in the glass. Gladys was not vain. Indeed, it was as if some one else speaking in the darkness had said: You are beautiful to-night. Her face was flushed, and her eyes shone like stars. Then she went to her aunt's chamber.

The air seemed close and stifling as she took down the chessmen from the shelf and began arranging them on the board.

"You have your king on the wrong square," said Aunt Isabel; and after the game was begun, "What put it into your head to ask Rowan here?"

"I think it would suggest itself to any one."

"But he refused once."

"I found a new argument. It is your move, Aunt Isabel."

"What argument?"

"I held out to him the inducement that he might see here some one whom he loves."

Leaning back in her chair, the old lady examined Gladys' face sharply. "What, so soon!"

"So it seems," said Gladys.

"That is strange. I had the same thought myself."

Then the game went on in silence.

"You play badly to-night, Gladys," said her aunt when it was finished.

"I have a headache — it is hot here;" and Gladys opened the window. A rush of warm wind swept in, causing the lights to flare. "I believe it is going to rain."

"There will be a storm," said Aunt Isabel. "If you have a headache, Gladys, you had better go to bed."

"You would like to roll me in blankets, — no, thank you. Besides, I told you Rowan was coming this evening."

"You told me nothing of the kind."

"If you will see him, and persuade him," Gladys said suddenly, "since it is your idea, I will go. I am tired."

"Very well. Shall I tell him you had a headache?"

"Why, certainly," said Gladys, putting the chessmen back in their box and ringing the bell. "Ellen, when Mr. Ferguson comes, you will show him up here. Good-night, Aunt Isabel."

"Good-night. Bring me my cap, Ellen," said the latter.

Gladys went to her room. The traveling-clock between the candles on her dressing-table was striking eight; she could not go to bed at that hour. There was a feeling of tightness about her head; she took off her dress and boots which bound her like shackles, and put on a loose morning gown and slippers. Something was taking form in her thoughts, — one could see it from the restless automatism of her movements. Suddenly she went to her desk and sat down to write: —

"DEAR JACK, — I am coming to town to-morrow. I shall send this by the night mail, hoping it will reach you in time for you to meet me — the morning train; if not, I shall go to Meyer's to lunch and wait for you. I might as well tell you now, — do you want to take me with you?

You will wonder what has become of my aversion to the water. You see it was not safe to urge me, since I change my mind at the last moment. GLADYS."

She rang the bell, folding her note hurriedly, as if there were danger of another change such as she had mentioned in her letter.

"Tell James, Ellen, to take this letter to the office; and, if the mail is closed, to go himself to the station. And — wait; I am going with Mr. Temple for a week or more on the yacht. When you come back, pack the two small trunks — my flannel dresses — both — the blue and the white — and some warm things. Here are the keys. I will see Mr. Ferguson myself when he comes; and Ellen, Mr. Ferguson will make my aunt a visit. He is to have this room, and you will move everything of mine to the east chamber, — next Mabel's. Take the letter first, and then send Margaret to me."

After Ellen was gone, Gladys went to her drawer and took from her jewel-case the cross of opals.

"Margaret," she said to the nurse, who came in answer to her summons, "if Mr. Temple sees best, I shall take Mabel with me for a week on the yacht; at all events, you will be ready to-morrow in case I telegraph for you; if not, I shall be back . . . soon. And, Margaret, you will not let Mabel go to the river alone."

Then Gladys went down to the library with the cross in her hand.

It was nearly nine; still Rowan did not come. She took from the table a book in one of those dainty bindings which had led to its selection for this place of honor. Indeed, Gladys had never examined its contents before. A border of red tracing ran up the illuminated pages. She read the title on the page to which she opened, — The Dying Soldier's Message, — but the words meant nothing to her. What she saw was the cross which burned within her tightly closed fingers. She read at first without understanding the lines, till gradually, like some far-away lonely music, their pathos stole in upon her attention unawares.

"God knows whether my mother is yet alive,
I assure you I would not afflict her.
If she lives, tell her I am too lazy to write,
That my regiment is on the march, that she must not expect me.
And my little neighbor, — you remember her, —
It is a long time since we have seen each other;
She does not think of me. However that may be,
Tell her the truth without fear of afflicting her.
If she weeps, her tears will not last long."

She felt her eyes growing hot, and closing the book quickly went to the terrace door. The night was dark, and on the black surface of the glass her own image confronted her warningly.

The clock on the mantel began to strike — nine — he would not come. A large moth, outside, climbed up the smooth pane, its eyes shining like rubies in the night. She opened the door and stepped out upon the terrace. The strong south wind seemed to hold it and beat her back; then, rushing past her, extinguished the light and left her in darkness.

She crossed the terrace slowly. She was not conscious of having made any decision, yet went down the steps unhesitatingly, avoiding the graveled walk. What was she going to do? She did not know, though she knew perfectly well what she was doing. The momentous peril, the uselessness, the folly of it, were as real as the darkness enveloping her; but these did not stay her, nor the rustling trees huddled together in black groups, nor a cold drop which fell from the closing clouds on her bare head. "To-morrow I shall be gone," she kept repeating to herself, holding fast to her resolve, as if every step on the soft grass threatened it. The galop of a horse outside the gate caused her to stop; it was James coming back from the station. What was she doing there? The light above the entrance fell on her face and dress, and she drew back into the shadows which a moment before had terrified her with a sudden fear and sense of humiliation. Where was she going? What was

this passionate desire her feet obeyed? To open her heart to eyes that could only pity; so to love love that she must barter everything for a look of recognition, a sigh of compassion? She pressed her hands to her head; the thought that she was mad flashed through her mind. No, it was not her head; the pain was in her heart. It was not love he should see, but the pain; love he would not understand, but pain he could share. James, standing up in the stirrups, put out the light; it was late, and going to rain. Gladys listened to the sounds of the horse's feet as they died away. Her thoughts grew confused, and slid out of her grasp. She was walking, — falling, — and her hand tightened on the cross. How hard her heart beat against it in her palm! "When one loves, one loves," it seemed to say.

Straight on, past the solitary light of Schonberg's window, down the lane to Rowan's gate. There she stopped, irresolute. The house was dark. The wind had ceased, and a cold, fine rain, which made her tremble, fell steadily on the trees, dropping from leaf to leaf.

How came she there? A moment ago she was in her own room. She raised her hand to her eyes as if to shield them from a light. How dark it was! she could see nothing; how had she found her way? Her forehead was burning, and wet! When had it begun to rain? Oh, yes, she

remembered now; they were going down the river; there was an island there. No, it was her picture, and Mabel, Mabel was with her. She must find Mabel; the child would be wet through. No, it was night; she was only dreaming. She must have fallen asleep with that Russian book in her hand, — and involuntarily her fingers closed on the cross, giving a new direction to her wandering thought, — yes, the cross, she was going to give it to Rowan, — that was what the book had said: "Tell him the truth without fear of afflicting him; if he weeps, his tears will not last long."

She went up the path as if it had been noonday, opened the door, and entered the studio. Where should she put it? Not for worlds would she have him dream what she was doing. How cunning she was! She would put it in the great chair where she had sat; he would think she had dropped it there. She groped her way to the chair, smiling in the dark, when, almost there, she heard a sound that chilled her heart with terror. It was Nestor in the lane. She sprang to the door, and hid herself in the lilac bushes within the gate. Between the shivers of the trees, at every lull in the rain, she listened. The pitiless drops fell on her face, on her neck, on her hair. Hark! he was coming; she must fly. As she turned, softly, — oh, so softly! — her

dress caught in the shrubbery, and brought down a shower of rain and dried leaves.

"Be quiet, Nestor," said Rowan's voice.

She tore the traitor lace from the branch: it was too late; he was there, close beside her. The ground swayed under her feet; her dress, heavy with moisture, dragged her down. She made a desperate effort not to fall, with that last strength which flares up like a flame before it expires, and straightening herself as the white willow when the wind has passed, reeled —

"Why, Gladys!" she heard him say; then the rain and the cold, the shame and the fear, all disappeared in unconsciousness.

He caught her as she fell. "Gladys," he whispered; then louder, "Gladys!" A little pool had gathered in the hollow of the stones; he dashed the water in her face. She opened her eyes, but they saw nothing; a long, deep sigh, like the last breath of the dying, and the force was spent.

Frightened, he raised the form sliding through his arms; it was cold and wet. The dress clung to his limbs, and the chill struck to his heart. He laid her down upon the grass, taking off his coat and wrapping it about her; then lifting her again began to run. At the corner of the lane he was forced to lean for a moment against the lamp-post exhausted; she was slipping from his

grasp. The hair had fallen, but a rose she had fastened there that afternoon clung to it still. He lifted the head upon his shoulder and began to run again. The light at the gate of The Towers was extinguished, and the road so black that he stopped at times to feel the border of grass with his feet. In the house, not a light. The library window was open, and entering, he stood for a moment, irresolute, listening. Within all was silent; there was no sound but the beating of his own heart next the burden in his arms, whence came a dead perfume of the crushed rose and wet hair. He groped his way to the lounge, and, laying her there, went into the hall. There were voices in the rear of the house; he knew every door, and advanced softly towards the passage leading to the kitchen. Ellen, hearing footsteps, met him at the threshold.

"Where is Mr. Temple?" he asked, before she could utter her surprise.

"Mr. Temple left this afternoon, sir," she replied.

"And are you Mrs. Temple's maid?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your name? Come in, and shut the door."

"Ellen, sir." She had recognized him, and, in his face, that look impossible to conceal, announcing disaster.

"Do you love your mistress, Ellen? Hush!" he interrupted. "Never mind; go up to her room and wait. Above all, be quiet. Do you understand?"

He stood at the foot of the stairs till she had disappeared with the candle in her hand, then went back to the library.

Dumb with curiosity and apprehension, Ellen glanced about the room as she entered it. There was no one there. It was ten o'clock. She had prepared Gladys' bed for the night. It was just as she had left it a half hour before, the clothes turned back and the night-dress with its lace ruffle folded on the pillow. Presently she heard Rowan coming slowly up the stairs. She had a premonition that he was bringing her mistress with him, and was not surprised, though speechless, when she saw the white mass, with its stained and discolored dress, laid under the satin hangings of its bed.

She approached with the candle, but he took it roughly from her hand, placing it so that the bed was in the shadow, and, grasping her arm, drew her away to the door.

"Listen," said he. "You are not afraid? Do just as I tell you. Unfasten her dress, boots; take them all away, — everything to show that she has been out, the wet, the mud. Do you understand?"

Ellen made a sign of assent. "And of my being here to-night, not a word, remember! Can you keep a secret, for her sake? When you are ready, send for the doctor instantly, and wake her aunt. You have brandy? — but first of all, the dress." As he spoke he looked at her keenly, and she seemed to him worthy of confidence; so much so that he added, "I give you my word of honor that in doing as I bid you are serving your mistress best and doing right. Hurry, now," and he let go her arm.

She went to the bed, and began to loosen deftly the disordered dress.

"If you do as I bid you, there will be only one question asked. Where did you first see her?"

"Here," said Ellen.

"Of course, in her bed. Can you lie?"

"Yes, sir," said Ellen, simply.

"You may, — must, if necessary. Have no fear."

He went down the stairs, through the library door, hurrying as if something still depended on his haste.

Nestor, on guard at the step before the door, waited his return. Rowan threw himself in a chair and buried his face in his hands. The dog came and laid its head on his knee, while facing him was the picture of Gladys, her blue eyes

full of smiles. Was it true, did she really love him? — Gladys, whose moods were like shadows of passing clouds, and fancies like the flight of swallows ever on the wing.

Sitting beside him on its haunches, the dog gave a low, impatient whine. Something glittered in its mouth, — a cross of opals, set with diamonds.

XXX.

The pulse was slow, the breathing regular and deep.

"Take the candle away," said the doctor, as Gladys, muttering low, indistinguishable words, turned restlessly from the light.

The physician had been summoned by telegraph from the city. Twenty-four hours had elapsed, and he must return that night; an important consultation the next morning allowed him but a half hour to stay. Aunt Isabel watched him intently as he stood by the bedside, his eye quiet but keen, his mouth resolute but mobile, — one would say a man capable of great mistakes and great successes. The minutes passed in silence. There were only thirty, and Aunt Isabel grew impatient. He took up a bottle on the table near the bed, examining the

label in an absent way, while she smoothed the pillow and ruffled night-dress, disordered by Gladys' unquiet slumber.

"There has been no — no strong emotional disturbance?" he said, taking the clinical thermometer gently from the arm.

"No," said Aunt Isabel, promptly.

"Of any kind?" She shook her head. "Nor anxiety?" he continued, replacing the bulb in its case.

"She played chess with me that very evening."

"As well as usual?"

"No."

"Any unusual exposure to cold or rain?"

"None. That is impossible."

Ellen, standing in the shadow at the foot of the bed, made a movement, which she instantly repressed.

A footstep was heard on the stair; then the door opened, and the village physician entered. Aunt Isabel introduced the colleagues, and much against her will left them together. But, hurrying away to catch the train, the stranger was intercepted.

"Well?" said the old lady, with a tremor in her voice.

He made a gesture with his hand, as if to say, "I promise nothing."

At the terrace door another woman, bold with love and fear, confronted him.

"She knows nothing, sir. She was brought home wet, and cold as ice." He seemed to understand, in spite of the ambiguity of Ellen's pronouns, continuing his walk across the terrace to the carriage waiting at the steps, its side-lights burning. "I am the only one who knows. I hope I 've done right in telling you, sir."

"I knew it before, my good girl, — that, or something else," he replied, getting in; and, looking at his watch, "Drive on!" he said to the coachman.

"What were you doing on the terrace, Ellen?" asked Aunt Isabel, as the former came up the stairway.

"He left his little black case on the table," said Ellen, quickly; and, pleased with her facility of speech, she reëntered her mistress' chamber, taking her place at the bedside with the lighter heart which rewards a clear conscience.

But Gladys neither saw nor heard her; nor the nurse the doctor sent later from the city to replace her, — one whose mouth would not twitch, nor eyes moisten, as Ellen's did, and who would not start at every incoherent word or unquiet motion. There was no need that Aunt Isabel's voice should sink to a whisper as she approached the bed; nor that Jack, summoned hastily from the roar of the city and the flapping sails of the Vixen, should hush even Ma-

bel's laughter on the terrace. For Gladys did not hear these strange footsteps which invaded her chamber, and was indifferent to all solicitude. Only one avenue from without was open, light; the feeblest ray, straying in through the closed shutters, bit like an asp and seared like flame.

. . . . . .

Imagine pictures on an arras wall, succeeding each other as by magic, distinct, single, but momentary. Such are the acts, the states of mind, revealed by consciousness. Of these ceaselessly changing pictures, now and then one is caught on the sensitive plate of the memory, while the snail Thought, with its mole eyes, looks on wisely as they pass, the unending frieze of Life: Sorrow mute, and Joy singing; Desire with hungry eyes, and Satiety tired but sleepless; Hate aflame, and Love aglow. But the myriad moving threads which make up these pictures are unseen; the causes which determine the act, the state, in all their subtle play, escape consciousness; it sees the single resultant of infinite forces, the simple sum of innumerable elements. Thus we live, bat-like, in gloom, and our impuissance is our power. For, magnify this vision of consciousness, show us the tumult of the looms behind the arras, and straightway Thought, the snail, is paralyzed — Delirium!

So for Gladys. The outer world solicited her in vain, for within what visions! The universe had melted into atoms, and every atom was a world. With what a dizzy velocity they swept by! How their paths crossed and twisted! It was no longer the pictures on the arras wall of consciousness, but the flux and play of the million threads, the whir of the looms; music unending, but every note a thousand vibrations. Where were the sky curtains, shot with stars? Rent now like veils, behind which opened interminable vistas. Time, itself, shrinking and expanding, stretching moments into æons, and crushing millenniums into seconds.

. . . . . .

"Unconscious," the doctor had said; a strange word, full of strange comfort.

At length, one day the fear and dazzlement disappeared from Gladys' eyes, and the eyes themselves closed heavily.

"Stupor," he said.

"And afterwards?" asked Aunt Isabel, trying hard to speak naturally.

"One thing or the other," was the reply. "The scale is balanced; on the side it dips it will stay."

. . . . . .

Stupor! Say, rather, peace. The rocking stars fixed again, and the sea in slumber; the din a

murmur, like the far tramp of receding armies, and the light an afterglow, as of invisible suns.

Then began the slow resurrection of the past. She was no more an actor, but a witness, before whom its scenes defiled in endless procession. A thousand events and impressions, unconsciously registered, emerged from oblivion; as the dew, falling unseen and imperceptible, under the cover of night, shines in the morning sun.

. . . . . .

She saw a little girl chasing a butterfly in a field of clover. Now at rest on a clover-top, now on the wing, a golden fleck in the sunshine, the insect led the child in zigzag lines across the field; down the slope to the tiny stream among the cardinal flowers; over the yielding moss, in which the foot sank; and up through the sweet-fern bushes in the pasture to the edge of the wood, where it fluttered upward, and vanished. Breathless with the chase the child stopped; its little feet were wet, its apron torn, its hat lost, the butterfly gone. Its lip quivered and its eyes began to swim, for where was home, and what would home say? Gladys smiled. She felt no alarm. She remembered it all, and knew the nurse was already hurrying after the little truant. It amused her. It was so strange to stand aside, to let some one else live for you, while you looked on. But what a foolish little

girl! with nothing to show for her lost hat and torn apron, not even the scarlet flowers.

. . . . . .

She was in her chamber, when she had one all her own. A young girl was standing before the glass fastening a white rose in her hair. It did not seem to satisfy her, for she put it aside and selected another, holding it to her throat; finally she chose a red one, and hid it quickly in her bosom, which nothing yet had troubled. Gladys saw the eyes shining out from the mirror, — herself. She knew every thought in their deeps, and how fast the heart was beating under the white muslin. She would have lingered in that room; crept into its bed canopied with dreams. Ah, if at the first breath of autumn the butterfly could fold its wings and steal back again into the chrysalis! From below came up the sound of music, the hum of voices, and the breath of flowers; the young girl extinguished the light, went out, and closed the door behind her. Do butterflies sleep in chrysalides when flowers are abloom and the birds are come from the south again?

. . . . . .

Hark! some one called her. Far off, like the outlet of a cave, a spot of light shone in the dark, and within its circle a strange face looked down upon her. Some one was holding her hand; she

drew it away, and at the same time a mist spread over the face, the light contracted, then disappeared.

It was only a dream; she was awake again. There was that young girl once more, — no, a woman now. How beautiful she was! The thought brought a hot blush to Gladys' cheek, and at the same time she laughed under her breath — she was not speaking of herself! But her vision was no longer clear as before; she could not read the woman's heart as she had the young girl's, nor follow the thoughts crossing the deeps of those eyes. She had missed something. The thread of life she had been retracing was broken and lost. At times, too, the dream returned, with voices like the droning of bees. How full of lights they were, those eyes — like May woods — lights and evanescent shadows. Certainly they were happy eyes, yet she searched them wistfully; somewhere in the May woods was a dove with a broken wing; till at last, far down below the swimming surface, in the heart whence all their lights and shadows came, she found — a wound! That was not strange; there were cases on record, — bullets carried a lifetime, unsuspected. But hush! not a whisper — why tell her? See, how happy she is! the world courts her, one can hardly follow her now in the crowd, among the lights and

flowers — was it these which hid the flutter of the dove's wing? How should one reach her to get one little word to her ear, so pressed about, fêted, and crowned — and in her hand, another smaller one. Why tell her, then? Every one knows the heart has graves; the foot can scarce tread there for the tombs; hopes, dreams, all that is born there comes back thither to sleep as flowers to the sod whence they sprung. No, not a whisper! for who sees the frost or knows when it fell? Hush! she must steal out of this heart, out of its farthest corner — softly! Oh, if she should waken it, disturb these graves where its children lie! How had she dared enter, and what way had she come; here, this way, through the May woods. Hark again! a cry, — the cry of the wounded dove. It was she, herself, Gladys, who was waking; the path was wet, the leaves dripped with rain, she was cold, and it was night — Hurry, oh, hurry! he was coming — Rowan!

. . . . . .

Her hand strayed feebly over the coverlid; her dress was warm and dry. She opened her eyes; it was dark, but not night. That sound she heard was not rain, but the ticking of her clock on the dressing-table. She looked up, and saw a man standing beside her with grave, watchful eyes. He stooped over her, and she heard a kind voice say: —

"There, my child, be quiet and rest."

And in spite of her curiosity, while struggling to waken memory, and still battling with her drowsiness, she could but obey this strange voice, this strange hand which patted her shoulder so gently as the heavy lids closed against her will, and for the first time for days Gladys slept.

XXXI.

When Gladys parted from Rowan in the lane on the morning of her last sitting, a single sentence of hers was ringing in his ears, — "Till Miss Fleming goes." What did Gladys mean? He wished to ask her; but she had left so hastily that before he recovered from his surprise her white dress was already a far-away spot of light in the shadows of the elms. He reëntered the house, and, taking up his brush and palette, began to work upon the drapery of Gladys' dress. It was what he had intended to do after she was gone; but every motion was a mechanical one; his thought was elsewhere. All that had filled these days of rest and leisure disappeared from view before the supreme end which this single sentence had disclosed, and towards which every energy of his nature was now directed. He determined to see Seraphine that very afternoon,

and when dinner was over went out in the direction of the Flemings'. As he passed Schonberg's he heard the voice of Elize on the porch, where arrangements were being made for the morrow's excursion. A sudden timidity overcame his resolution, and he passed by without turning his head. If he could only see Seraphine alone! All the afternoon he wandered through the fields and along the river behind the house in the vague hope of meeting her, but without seeing any one except Schonberg, sitting alone in the tea-house and muttering to himself, with now and then a rising inflection as if asking a question, after which he drew his gown about his legs and lapsed into silence.

It was supper-time when he returned home. At all events he should see Gladys that evening, he thought.

Immediately after supper he took his hat again and went out. It was yet too early. Gladys would not have finished her dinner; but to be on the way made the time seem shorter, even though that way were the longer one by the river. On reaching the tea-house he sat down to wait until Gladys should be ready to receive him. What she had said that morning had been a relief to him. If once, in the surprise of the discovery that he had touched the heart of his cousin, his pride had been secretly

gratified, the thought was now a disquieting one. He had never loved her; all her ways irritated him, and on the news of her marriage he experienced the relief of one whose judgment receives a long-wished-for confirmation. Since his return, however, this judgment had become disturbed. What he wished to believe — that she loved to tease, or, at most, that a woman could never feel towards one she has once loved as towards others — was sometimes difficult. But now Gladys herself had cleared away his perplexities: still, he resolved not to accept her invitation.

Before him, the river, turning sharply westward, ran straight as a road through the dense pine woods, whose dark lines framed in the distant horizon. Overhead the sunset clouds sailed in the south wind, and below on the river their softened images floated down like scarlet barges between the black walls of pine. Slowly the waters began to grow dark and the clouds to lose their color, till at last only that far horizon lingered fresh as a rose set in the sombre shadows of the forest. In the pine woods it was already night. Lights twinkled in the homesteads on the plain across the river, where the cows were housed, the sheep gathered in, and the labor of the day finished. One by one the indistinguishable sounds of night, which render its silence only more profound, came up

like a fog from the lowlands, and above in the pines the murmur of the wind rose and fell with the low crooning of a summer song.

As the village bell struck, Rowan took the path leading out upon the main road between Schonberg's and the Flemings'. At the gate in the wall between the two houses he stopped again. From behind the curtain of Seraphine's room a light shone on the chestnut tree outside the window. She was there, — so near to him. He pictured to himself the interior of that room, its ornaments and furniture; and his heart began to beat violently. How long he remained there he could not have told; but the last trace of day had disappeared, and Night, the enchantress, was filling the world with mystery. Out of the willows, like a bird, the breeze sallied, like a bird's wing swept over the grass, hovered an instant above the thicket, and vanished again. Beyond, the river glittered with stars; not a sound to betray its flow. Near the shore were black patches of leaves where the water lilies gazed out wonderingly upon the earth flowers, upon the sombre trees stretching in interminable lines along the banks, between whose walls, as in a chasm, flowed that other river, on whose bosom floated also innumerable blossoms, and over whose surface, here and there, a stray cloud spread like a night bird its black wings.

O Nature, whom we invest with our own divinity, from whose dumb lips issues our own song, what were thy mysterious night, but for the soundless mystery of love? What were the breath of thy night wind, setting free a sea of perfumes, but for love breathing on the human heart? What thy lilies or thy sky, but for the soul's hopes and longings struggling upward unsatisfied till they also see the heaven-fields and the unquenchable stars?

He was no longer thinking of anything: he simply gave himself up to the feeling that she was there, within sound of his voice, almost within reach of his hand, when suddenly, where the path curved behind the willows, the leaves rustled, and a white form appeared. Without his assent the word "Seraphine" escaped from his lips.

The young girl started and stood still.

"Seraphine," he repeated, opening the gate.

She did not speak nor retreat. He hurried towards her and took her hand. On her face was an expression of fear and unspeakable surprise. And yet before that first embrace of his eyes hers did not fall nor falter; she knew what was before her; she had no fear, and nothing could surprise her. No one had told her he would be there. Yet she knew, and all that was to take place. He drew her gently with him,

still holding her hand in his, as though if he loosed it she would turn and fly. Yet she went without fear or trouble. A delicious peace filled her heart — the world. It seemed to her that all had been as it was a thousand years, as a thousand years it would be; and yet she knew, as the gate closed behind her, that a door was being shut upon a past into which she should not enter again. He led her to the seat where she had passed so many hours with Schonberg and Elize. She did not see the dark shadows of the pines above it, nor the gathering clouds between which, here and there only, a star gleamed momentarily.

"Seraphine," he whispered again, drawing her towards him. She tried to rise, to speak, but could not — and hid her face.

Half an hour later he stood alone at the gate, beyond which she had just disappeared among the willows. An indescribable joy filled his heart. It was all true? No longer a dream, — a reality? He remembered the first time they had met, in the woodland road; he had frightened her then, but what a steadfast light burned in her startled eyes! She would walk where she had chosen, without asking others what she should do, — and she had chosen! He recalled every moment that had just passed; so few, and never to be repeated, yet redeeming this life and

pledging another. He had forgotten to ask if she were going away. But what matter? How could she go away! Then he began to dream, and at those dreams let him smile who has not longed for day to end, for the hour when the last good-night is said, the door shut, the light extinguished, that free, alone, he may enter the realm of sleep through the gate of love's first dreams.

The bell in the village steeple commenced to strike again. Gladys would be waiting for him. How he had misjudged dear Gladys! At that moment there was no room for misconceptions in his heart, no place for wrong in the world. Eight, nine — what, ten? It was too late; and when had it begun to rain? He would see Gladys in the morning and explain it all to her.

But Gladys, trembling at his door, was already beyond the reach of his excuses.

Schonberg, writing at his table, was roused that evening by the sound of feet on the piazza. He rose with his quill in his hand, when the door opened; in the entry stood Seraphine.

"It is you!" he exclaimed, with a gesture of surprise.

"Myself."

Her eyes shone as she offered him her cheek. He touched it with his lips; it was not a kiss,

for cheeks so fresh and fair are not made for threescore years.

"Why, my child, you are wet. It rains?"

"It is nothing. Wait." And unfastening the handkerchief about her neck she dried her moist face and hair. "Are you alone?" The energy of her question caused him to look about the room as if he expected to discover some one. "Ah, you were writing," she said, going to the table and sitting down in his chair. "I disturb you."

"Not at all," he replied, observing her with astonishment.

"Come, let us have a little fire; my feet are wet. Yes, it rains;" and throwing her handkerchief on the table she stooped to the hearth and lit the fire. The dry wood blazed up quickly, casting a red light upon her face and bosom.

"Your feet are wet," said Schonberg, standing over her.

"I had only my slippers," she replied, holding one foot to the flame.

"What folly, what folly!" he repeated, endeavoring to assume an air of severity.

She turned her head and smiled. He had never seen her so exhilarated; her every attitude betrayed a secret happiness, which escaped, too, in every motion and published itself in the clear but tremulous tones of her voice. A pair of

slippers hung beside the fireplace on a nail, — an important element in Schonberg's domestic economy, — and in an instant she had removed her own and plunged her feet in their cavernous depths. "You wish to scold me; I am waiting," she said, drawing out from their huge receptacles one small foot after another, and holding them alternately to the blaze.

Schonberg walked once or twice across the room, hesitating each time he approached her, and finally sat down again, making a pretense of arranging his papers.

"Well, you have nothing to scold me for?" and suddenly, from behind, he felt her arms about his neck and her cheek beside his.

"No — seriously — Seraphine" — he stammered, endeavoring to loosen the arms, which caused him a feeling both of pleasure and embarrassment.

"And am I not serious?" she whispered. "Tell me, what shall I do to be serious? Is it forbidden to kiss you? Answer quickly . . . it will be too late" —

"Be reasonable, Seraphine. You have something to tell me" —

"Yes, listen," and she drew her arms closer. "Shut your eyes — fast — I am happy, happy, happy."

He turned in his chair, but only to see her at

the door, a finger lifted to her lips as if forbidding him to follow.

It might have been a dream, but for the handkerchief on his table and the embers on his hearth.

XXXII.

When, after leaving Ellen, Rowan found himself alone in the still falling rain, the conviction that he was doing right suddenly deserted him. Under the necessity of action his mind had worked with the lucidity and rapidity of instinct; now, misgivings and forebodings assailed him. He hurried home, and throwing himself upon the lounge endeavored to collect his thoughts, to satisfy his conscience, to quiet his fears. An hour ago life had been an inexhaustible happiness. What had he done? what had happened? The unfinished face of Gladys looked at him from the canvas reproachfully. He had carried her secretly to her chamber: all his desire had been to reach that room unobserved. Why? The reason which had prompted him was an insult to her. Moreover, he had acted contrary to every conviction; her last words had been of plans for him and Seraphine. Once, perhaps, it might have been so; but now, pride alone would render it impossible! Everything was

against such a supposition. Oh, a liking, a little pique — a love to tease; but a love to bring her to his door, at his feet, — he was a fool to think of it. Yet he had scarcely begun to experience the relief this reasoning afforded him, when the certainty under which he had acted returned. Something rose out of those unfinished eyes, as out of a hungry heart, and took possession of him. It was true, — he knew it was true; and his thought went back to the days when they had first met, when they had parted, when he knew that for the asking —

He got up and began to walk the room. He experienced a feeling of revolt against this love which appropriated his life, — revolt and pity. "No, no, it is impossible," he repeated. "She was sick; mad, mad!" and an anxiety for what he had done succeeded. Deception was repugnant to him. Why should he assume so grave a responsibility? Who would comprehend it should the truth become known? He had given Gladys up to nameless suspicion in pledging Ellen to secrecy, whereas if he had but told Aunt Isabel — Why should he not tell her? and he put on his hat as if to go out. But it was now too late, and Aunt Isabel would think as he did. She had upbraided him once for his blindness; he could not count on hers now. No, he had done rightly. Gladys must be saved. She,

who had uncovered her heart to his eyes, what would she think of him if he called Aunt Isabel to see? Certainly, she was mad, — and his thoughts retraced again the same endless circle. After all, why should he persist in believing what Gladys would herself deny? This argument, so simple, reassured him. She herself would explain how she came there; why should he attribute such folly to her before she had an opportunity to interpret her own actions? Nestor had frightened her. . . . It was while he was thus thinking that the dog laid its head on his knee with a low whine. Something metallic clicked in Nestor's mouth; it was Gladys' cross. He had forgotten its existence; but what its broken circle of fires said to him caused him to cover his face with his hands. It was true, — it was true!

In one thought alone he found an intense relief. He would tell Seraphine all.

Worn out with anxiety, Rowan had fallen asleep at last on the lounge, but a succession of disordered fancies had robbed slumber of rest. Now it was Gladys' pale face he lifted on his shoulder; now he struggled for breath on the slippery sod; then he saw that face still, an invincible force closing its blue eyes forever, till, changing mysteriously, it disappeared, and there was Seraphine's in its place, smiling sadly.

When he awoke the sun was shining warmly after the rain. So gayly did the birds sing in the branches outside the window they almost persuaded him there was nothing to fear. He looked at his watch, — it was eight o'clock, — made a hurried toilette, and hastened to The Towers.

On the way he encountered Schonberg, in excellent spirits.

"You are going to The Towers? Tell your cousin the day is fine, and the river is calling her."

Rowan looked at him, without understanding a word.

"We are going on the river, that is all," said Schonberg.

"Mrs. Temple will not be able to go to-day. She is not well."

"Not well?" said Schonberg, with surprise. "What is the matter?"

"I am going to see," and Rowan hurried on.

As he approached the house all his fears came back again. The curtains of Gladys' chamber were drawn, and Margaret, who carried his message to Aunt Isabel, spoke in a whisper. Waiting in the library, into which the sun struggled through the crevices of the closed blinds, he remembered the day when his mother lay there, — there, where the table stood. It seemed to him as if the strong perfume of flow-

ers filled the room again, and the voice he did not then understand was repeating the words, "In such an hour as ye think not." Years of sunlight had not driven that shadow out of his heart.

Aunt Isabel was not one to wring her hands, but her face, haggard with anxiety and wakefulness, appalled him. It wore that expression of impotence so profound that it does not ask for help, but appeals only for sympathy.

"Is Gladys very sick?" he asked.

Aunt Isabel was sitting in her armchair, a little pot of coffee beside her, which exhaled a delicious fragrance.

"What does the doctor say?" he asked again, for she had made no reply.

"The little he can."

He walked to the window, and looked out upon the lawn, spread with wet webs sparkling in the sun.

"Do you mean there is really danger?"

"My God! She played chess with me here at this table last evening," said the old lady, looking at the table vacantly, without seeming to hear his question. "Why did you not come last night?" she asked, abruptly. "She expected you. A little headache; who would have thought it, — who would have thought it!"

"What can I do?" said Rowan, feeling that he could do nothing.

"One must eat and sleep," moaned the old lady to herself, sipping her coffee.

"Have you sent for Mr. Temple?"

She made a sign of assent. Evidently she suspected nothing. Gladys' secret was safe.

"Tell me what I can do," he repeated.

"Nothing. No one can do anything; that is the pity of it, to sit and wait."

It was on his lips to tell her; but what would be gained?

"Can you take Mabel with you this morning?"

"Why, certainly," he said, quickly.

"Yes, amuse her; tell her stories. I will send her to you on the terrace."

He opened the door softly, and went out on tiptoe. Ellen was coming up the stairs. "If she wakes, tell her nothing is known," he said to her. Ellen's significant eyes annoyed him. Why should he feel guilty? It was Gladys' secret, not his; and yet, walking down the avenue with Mabel's hand in his, a persistent voice with which he could not reason reproached him. It was not the voice of conscience, but of Gladys, — the Gladys of long ago, — and he could not silence it. The thought of Seraphine, to whom he was going, made him almost angry with Gladys. Meanwhile, Mabel's little hand in his said to him, Love does not reason; it appropriates.

"Mamma is not well, Mabel," he said, with an effort to shake himself free. "How would you like to come with me for a row on the river?"

"I would," said Mabel. "What makes mamma sick?" she asked, as they went on.

"I don't know," said Rowan, looking down on her yellow hair.

"When we come home she 'll be better probably," she replied, with an air of complete satisfaction. "Probably" was one of Mabel's latest acquisitions, which she took especial pleasure in putting to use. "May I swing on the gate? Mamma lets me."

"You may do anything your mamma lets you."

She ran ahead, her hair floating out under her straw hat, and, pushing back the heavy iron gate, swung herself on the lower bar, laughing triumphantly. "Bang!" she shouted, squeezing her eyes together as it closed noisily.

"Wait for me here," said Rowan, crossing the street to the Flemings'.

The door was wide open, and, in the chamber above, he heard Elize singing: —

"The bee with his comb,
The mouse at her dray,
The grub in its tomb,
Wile winter away;
But the firefly and hedge-shrew and lob-worm, I pray,
How fare they?"

He stood for a moment undecided, when he heard Seraphine's step coming down the stairs, and all the beauty and freshness of the morning came back again. The momentary hesitation of her foot on the stair, the flush of surprise on her cheek, he did not see, but only those limpid eyes which replied to the happiness that filled his heart. They told him she had given herself without reserve out of her hands, but something more than the song growing nearer on the floor above made him wonder at what he had dared the night before.

"My cousin Gladys is very sick," he said, "and I am going to care for Mabel to-day. I have promised to take her on the river; will you come with us? Come," he whispered, as Elize appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Wait for me on the piazza. We are going on the river," she said to Elize. "Will you come?"

Elize glanced from Seraphine to Rowan. "How can I? I 'm the mouse at her dray, the bee with his comb, to-day. You see, Mr. Ferguson," she said, with an explanatory gesture, "housekeeping is unending honey-making, and winter comes three times a day; that is the reason Seraphine and I take turns at the comb. Not with absolute regularity, you know," she added, laughing at her own impromptu, and recollecting

that she had intended to pass the day on the river herself; "in fact, it 's a plan I just thought of; but you approve of it, don't you?"

"It is certainly a just one."

"I did not intend it to be simply just, but also generous," said Elize, significantly. "Besides, Seraphine and I have completed our grub state, you know. We shall have our wings presently, and then!" — and sitting down on the doorstep, Elize made another gesture, signifying possibilities unspeakable.

"What do you mean?" said Rowan.

"Has n't Seraphine told you?" she exclaimed, with genuine surprise.

"Told me what?"

"Do you really mean — I shall have to sing you another song from Browning, — about Kate, the queen; do you remember? 'But that fortune should have thrust all this upon her!' Did you ever hear of Dinant?" she asked, enjoying his bewilderment. "Dinant in Flanders. Seraphine and I are going to invade Flanders, and open the campaign at Dinant."

"What are you going to Dinant for, Miss Fleming?" said Rowan, sitting down on the step beside her.

"What brought you to Ashurst, Mr. Ferguson?"

"Sentiment, partly; this was my home" —

"Well, sentiment will take us to Dinant. Sentiment — and the rest."

"I do not understand you."

"Why should you? It is not your fault; it's a fairy tale. Don't you remember any stories of princesses wandering about in dark woods, — like those you painted, — but real princesses, only disguised in rags, you know? Here comes Seraphine; ask her. Perhaps when you are alone, in the middle of the river, where Ashurst cannot hear you, Ashurst, that despises ancestors, — except Puritan ones, of course, — perhaps then she will tell you;" and with a good-by, like the dart the banderillo plants in the bull as he leaps the barrier, with a smile for its flaunting flag, Elize disappeared in the house.

XXXIII.

Rowan called Mabel, and the three went down the road to the boat-house.

In the sky above not a trace of the storm of the night before remained. The road was wet and muddy, with pools of yellow water; but in the fields and the woods, fresh from their rain-bath, a world of life was astir. A striped squirrel ran ahead on the fence-rails, and a bluebird preened itself on the post; the wayside was

alive with little brown sparrows, fluttering at their approach out of leafy ambushes to sway on bending weeds. In the air was a bracing freshness, — just a touch of winter ahead, — and among the pines on the hill-slopes patches of flaming oaks, interspersed with yellow mists of maple leaves. As they reached the boat-house, up the river, in short, wary flights, came a belted kingfisher with his metallic scream.

He did not speak except by furtive glances, to which Seraphine replied sometimes with a smile of happiness. Since the night before she was no longer the same woman to him, and in these quick glances he saw those little things which marked her off from all others, and which were inexpressibly dear to him. She wore her crimson dress; was it accident or design?

"What is it Elize means by your going away?" said he, while Mabel, on the float, was endeavoring to push the boat into the water.

"I had forgotten all that," she replied.

"All what, Seraphine?"

"You know my mother was an exile here, but we have just received news of our grandfather's death, and that we — Money is a very necessary thing," she said, looking up into his face; "but it is n't worth talking about."

"Are n't you going to get in?" teased Mabel, tugging at his hand.

They went down on the float silently.

"You will not only have to care for me, but mine," said Seraphine, as steadying herself with his hand she took her seat in the stern. He pulled a few strokes out of the flags into the open water which rippled from the prow, where Mabel leaned over, with eyes divided between the treasures of the water deeps and the image of her own curly head on its surface. "This is to be our life: you at the oar, I at the rudder. What does it matter if the currents are with us?"

"'But that fortune should have thrust all this upon her,'" he repeated.

"All what, Rowan? Things we do not care the most for?" And in saying this she thought how the world had changed for her since she talked of Dinant with Schonberg.

"I can see two skies," cried Mabel, with her head over the rail, "and fishes!"

"When do you go?"

"I do not know," she replied, lifting her eyes and letting them fall again.

"Dr. Schonberg goes with you?"

"Of course," she said quickly.

"But, Seraphine" — He ceased rowing and leaned forward. "I cannot let you go — you know that well" —

A deep color overspread her face. "Will you promise not to speak of it again, if I answer you now?"

"I promise."

"In Dinant I will be your wife," she said.

He stood up in the boat. "Why don't you row?" said Mabel, who suddenly found herself in Rowan's arms and heard him say, "I will row you to the end of the world." But to *her* he could not utter a word. For a long time he feared even to meet her eyes; what she had spoken clothed her with sanctity. When at last he regained possession of himself, it was to talk of Dinant, of her mother, and of Schonberg; uttering everything but his thoughts, — thoughts of which she nevertheless was conscious.

The boat had drifted into the flags again, and Mabel, leaning over the side, was pulling at the stems. "See!" she cried, climbing over the thwart and depositing her wet and muddy trophies in Seraphine's lap, "these are for you."

Notwithstanding Rowan's determination to tell Seraphine what had taken place, he found it more difficult than he had foreseen. His impulse was still to confide all to her; but love, in its first experience of happiness beyond the reach of trouble, trembles at the proving offices of counselor and friend. To withhold anything from her was repugnant to him. "Why should I?" he thought. Aunt Isabel, Jack, for Gladys' sake he might deceive; but Seraphine! Free from blame, why should he deceive her? And yet it

did not seem now so easy to explain as before. Even if there were no blame, it is praise, not acquittal, we ask from love. Was he about to inflict a pain to satisfy a sentiment? And there was Gladys; had generosity nothing for her? Certainly if he was blameless, it was not a duty; and if only a pleasure, was it not a cruel one?

On the homeward way they had stopped in the tea-house, as if to wait there were to arrest that fast-flying day.

"Seraphine," said Rowan, suddenly, "you have a right to know everything in my life, and have I none to your help and counsel?" She looked up with surprise, though she had been conscious of something — she did not know what — to come. Then he told her of his return home the evening before, and all that had transpired. But he could not stop there. There was a beginning as well as an end. He must go back, way back to the day when Aunt Isabel had sarcastically observed that she "could forgive a woman for loving, but not a man for not knowing it." That was years ago: he was a boy then, and she a girl. How could he know that in coming back . . . for Gladys was married. He stopped as if Gladys had risen from the bed where he had laid her, and with a look had struck him dumb.

Seraphine had not uttered a word. It had

seemed so simple to live and love; now, nothing was safe or sure. A pang of — she would not own it jealousy, for to first love jealousy, the index of its strength, seems to announce its end. A strange pity, too, mingled with her indignation against this woman, — wife and mother! — who had invaded the sanctity of her life.

"Seraphine," said Rowan, holding her hand fast in his, "I had to tell you. If you should have known it in some other way, how could I have explained, even if I had kept it for your sake? But that is not the reason; I can have nothing from you. It would never have been if I could have loved — any one but you. Can you not forgive me for confiding? I do not say confessing, — it would not be true. I do not say that it makes no difference, — it does. After last night nothing will ever be the same — but you."

He was right; there was nothing to forgive. If there only had been, her heart would have overflowed with tears. The blight for which we are not to blame is the cruelest, the cause to which we can least attach responsibility the most tragic. For the first time some unseen hand unrolled before her the web of good and evil, unveiled the chaos of atoms which cannot get out of each other's way. No man liveth to himself; we are always between some one and the sun.

She rose to her feet, disengaging her hand; it felt strangely in his.

"You are not displeased with me, Seraphine?"

She shook her head.

"Have I done rightly?"

She made another sign with her head, and they walked on side by side.

"Seraphine, you love me — you are not going to leave me so — without a word," he said as they reached the porch.

A sad smile passed over her lips. If she had not loved, there had been no pain. "A word, Rowan? I have spoken it — it can never be taken back, but" —

"But what, Seraphine? Tell me." She stood close beside him, and was so far away. "I know I have given you pain, I who would — Phrases!" he said, looking down, "they are not for you."

"But I love them," she whispered.

"Tell me you are happy," he said eagerly, secure again in her caressing smile.

She stood just above him, twisting the dark clusters on the woodbine climbing the post. "It seems as if we were dreaming yesterday. I was above everything; but now" —

"Seraphine!" he exclaimed, as if he would bury the words before they could be spoken in

the sound of her own name. But he understood her. The purple berries fell from her hand on his shoulder; she brushed them away softly, and went in the house. As he walked down the path with Mabel dancing like a butterfly in the sun, that touch of her hand on his shoulder was sweeter than reconciling words.

"Seraphine," said Elize that evening, tying the ribbon in her braid before the glass, "if it were all a mistake, and we were not going back to Dinant, would n't you be disappointed?"

"No," replied Seraphine hesitatingly.

"I should," said Elize, "miserably so. As it is, I am uncomfortably happy. This little room of ours we are going to leave reproaches me. It is almost as if when one is happy one ought not to ask why" — And fastening the buttons on her long night-dress, Elize rose and knelt down beside the bed.

"Certainly one ought to thank God for being happy," she said, rising from her knees, "but it seems terribly like thanking Him that we are not as others are." She got into bed, her eyes fixed upon the picture on the wall above, — the château of Walzins, overhanging the Lesse, which stole between the rock and the meadows, with shadowy forms of wall and turret, cress and yellow iris, on its limpid surface. "What do you think uncle said to me the other day?

That our happiness is always a drop of honey distilled from others' pain. Do you believe it ? "

"How could I be happy if I did?" said Seraphine.

XXXIV.

When Rowan returned with Mabel, James was in the garden covering the flowers in anticipation of an unseasonable frost. From him Rowan learned that Jack had arrived, and that the physician summoned from the city was expected on the last evening train. No one was on the terrace, and the house was still. On the way back he called on the village doctor, but he was not at home.

In the morning he returned again. The library door was open, but no one was within sight or hearing. The open door, the chairs under the awning, the closed blinds above, all betokened a profound indifference to the outside world. He waited awhile on the terrace, fearing to disturb this silence, and endeavoring to extract from the signs about him some good augury. At last, impatient with anxiety, he went in. Jack's hat was on the table. He opened the door into the hall softly, and ascending the stairs followed the long corridor leading

to Aunt Isabel's chamber. He was about to knock when he heard voices within, — the high, angry one of his aunt, and another expostulating and broken with sobbing. On the point of returning, suddenly the door opened, and Ellen came out. Her eyes were red with weeping, and Aunt Isabel, trembling with excitement, confronted him.

"Ah, it is you!" she cried. "This is very well; oh, yes, this is capital!"

He looked from her shining eyes to Ellen, who hung her head as if wishing to hide herself from him.

"Well! why do you stand there? You wish to hatch more misery?" The sound of her voice, breaking the silence of the house, more than what she said, caused him a sort of terror, and he entered the room quickly, closing the door behind him. "'Tell your mistress nothing is known,'" said Aunt Isabel derisively; "you should have told her while she could listen, — before killing her."

He turned pale, and advanced towards her, trembling.

"Is Gladys dead?"

"Is it any fault of yours if she is not? Heavens! and yesterday you were here asking questions, playing the innocent, — you who knew everything!"

"What do you mean?" he faltered, knowing perfectly well what she meant, and conscious that what he said was an absurdity.

"Oh, deny nothing; it is too late!" cried the old lady, walking the room and moving aimlessly the objects on her mantel and dressing-table without knowing what she was doing. He had never seen her in such a state. Her lips trembled with words she could not articulate, and her sentences were finished with gestures. "It is too late; Ellen has confessed everything. So you intrigue with servants! After such a night with the mother, you amuse the child with stories! Great God! and He permits such things! Yes, yes, I understand everything," she continued, arresting the exclamation on his lips. "We bury ourselves in a house out of the way. We shut ourselves up there with a woman who once loved us, to paint her portrait. And I, — Heaven pardon me! — I believe this rubbish! this innocent, whose good actions are paid in five-hundred-franc notes!"

"You are mad," said Rowan. He knew her explosive nature, and addressed these words to himself as if to remonstrate with his own rising anger.

"And we have meetings at night," she went on, without heeding him; "we bribe honest servants; we play with things we do not under-

stand, with fire. Why did you not bribe the fire? Do you know that fire burns? Well, honestly, I believe not. How should a fool know anything! Where was Gladys night before last?" she said, turning suddenly upon him.

"If you mean where did I find her," he replied, trying to speak calmly, "I found her at my doorstep."

"If I mean! At your doorstep! Marvelous! God forgive me, but in my time men were at least men. So you found her, — a fine story; found her, — and at your doorstep! And this is all you have to say!"

"Till you are reasonable enough to listen."

"Reasonable!" The word was fuel to her unreason. "First destroy, ravage, trample under foot, and then you will be reasonable. You are like the rest, — first passion, and afterwards reflection." She turned her back upon him, muttering to herself and adjusting her cap before the glass, and, finally, sitting down in her chair, took hold of its arms tightly. "Yes, let us be reasonable; let us try and save something," she said, despairingly.

Rowan looked at her without the power of saying a word. Hers stung and stupefied him. It was like a nightmare.

"Well, begin; but have a care," said Aunt

Isabel. "I am not a child to be amused with stories; and after what has happened" —

"What *has* happened?" he interrupted, losing patience. "What happened years ago when Gladys — I do not accuse her, but you know as well as I. I was the hundredth fly in the web, — spread unconsciously, let us say, — and I escaped!"

"Oh, the fine distance!" muttered Aunt Isabel. "With time men become gods."

"Fire! Who was it played with fire? Answer me."

"And he does not accuse her; he forgives her!" she muttered again, sarcastically.

He made a gesture of helplessness. "It is useless," he said, turning away.

"Rowan," she exclaimed piteously, following him with her eyes, "night before last Gladys was here. She played chess with me at this table." Her voice trembled and softened. "She had a headache. What does that signify? Yesterday she was going with Mabel to the yacht; her trunks were ready. There is something, — something you have not told me. Let us not trifle with each other, Rowan."

His anger rose as hers fell.

"What can I tell you, who divine everything? I have said I found Gladys at my door. Listen." The supplication of her eyes touched

him, and, sitting down beside her, he took her hand and told her all: of his first interview with his cousin, the discovery of Seraphine's portrait, everything that had passed between them. Sitting silently in her chair, her eyes fixed on the floor, he saw that she was listening eagerly. "Who could foresee this? You knew I was to return; you yourself would have been glad to have me here, in this house. Why did I bribe servants? Ask yourself, — you are a woman. I know what I have to do now," he said, standing before her: "I have to go. That is not much: if I hated her, I could do no less; if I loved her, no more. It is ignominious."

She looked at him mournfully. "Yes, go." There was a bitterness in the tones of her voice. "There may yet toll a bell here, and the sound is not pleasant; and I will stay — there is the husband to be deceived. At my age, lies and acting! but one must think of others. Yes, go; that is right, by all means. As you say, there is no help for it. You will go with Miss Fleming. In time you will forget it, and she will not know it."

Her words seemed to have lost the power to wound him. He saw the love from which they were wrung.

"You are mistaken. She knows it, and we shall not forget it."

"You have told her?"

"Because I love her," he replied laconically.

"He has told her!" muttered the old lady to herself. "What folly! And because he loves her!" She was no longer speaking to him; her eyes fixed on her hands, tying and untying the strings of her cap, she seemed to have lost all consciousness of his presence.

"And the trunks were all ready," he heard her say, as he went out the door.

Ellen was still in the corridor.

"Go in," he said to her. "She will forgive you."

XXXV.

Jack was coming down from his room, in the hotel he frequented while the city house was closed for the summer, when the hall-boy gave him his morning paper and letters. He took them with a nod, and descended the stairs to the rotunda with that air of physical well-being which belongs to health between the morning toilet and breakfast. Threading his way among the crowd going and coming in the open space before the office, with an occasional word to an acquaintance, and a glance at the bulletin-board to see that the weather promised fair for the Vixen, he entered the breakfast-room, where

the table in the farther corner, commanding a view of the door and the street, was reserved for him as usual. While the waiter, familiar with his tastes, — for Jack had long since passed the callow period when a *menu* is a source of perplexity, — was gone for breakfast, he glanced at the head-lines of the columns, ran his eye over the stock market, then, laying his paper on the window-sill, began to take the ice from the melon before him. His mail still remained where he had placed it, beside his plate. The melon finished, he took up the pile and examined the postmarks leisurely. Between a blue envelope from Messina and a yellow one from the city he found a large white one, of a square form, which he honored by opening immediately. If its contents surprised him, there was no evidence of the fact other than that, after finishing it, he held it open in his hand, with his eyes on the unending throng hurrying by the window, till the arrival of breakfast disturbed his reflections. The only visible outcome of Gladys' announcement was a list of stores, made out at intervals, and destined to supplement, on her account, the somewhat plain bill of fare which sufficed for his sea appetite. This detail completed, he gathered up his letters, ordered a carriage to meet Gladys' train, and passed out into the vestibule of the main entrance. It was

here, while lighting his cigar, that he received Aunt Isabel's dispatch. He looked at his watch, countermanded his order for the carriage, and, hailing a passing cab, drove rapidly to the Ashurst station.

Jack had always been credited with opinions he did not entertain, and tastes he did not possess. The tolerance with which he viewed the actions of others was attributed to an indulgence which did not, however, extend to his own. Elastic in his judgments, Jack was really quite inflexible in his principles; but he applied them so much more rigorously to himself than to others that what deserved the name of character passed for a happy combination of common sense and good nature. He was called lucky, yet he had no more faith in luck than the savage has. Confidence in his luck was so great, however, that in the currents of business life, among the whirlpools of speculation, people tied to him as to a barge moored midstream.

He belonged, by social position, to a society he could not ignore, and which could not ignore him. But society was generally thought to be a bore to him, while in reality he enjoyed it in his silent way, — like the flavor of a good cigar. It was astonishing how many people counted him their own particular friend. He never spoke of himself, — a source of popularity few

discover. He was not very "well read," and therefore had no second-hand information to distribute; but the results of his own observation and experience would sometimes ripple forth with the freshness and force of truth itself. Even the coquette liked Jack, while sparing him; he was too sincere to see that form of art, and, as Gladys said to Aunt Isabel after the ball where she first met him, "deliciously unconscious of his own qualities."

While riding to Ashurst with Aunt Isabel's dispatch in his pocket, it was not unnatural that he should recall that first night he saw Gladys. He could see her now: her small face just pensive and *spirituelle* enough to give the rather striking toilette its piquancy, the blue eyes filled to the brim with sadness, all the more effective because Gladys was never sad and the small mouth beneath them was always on the edge of a smile. He remembered, too, how, when summer came, Gladys, who detested sailing as he did lying at anchor, had arranged for a dinner on the Vixen with so naive a timidity and so peremptory an insistence that for the first time in his life he could not tell whether the act was his own or not. And this recollection brought to mind a cloud of white lace enveloped in a Moorish shawl, to which he had made a speech on that occasion whose intensity of purpose, lack of deliberation,

and deficiency in logical form had so surprised him.

"Miss Ferguson, I have always had an ideal of woman which you do not in the least fulfill . . . but I love you; can you be my wife?"

"Then you despair of meeting your ideal, Mr. Temple?" said Gladys, with a smile in her eyes like the moonbeams in the water.

"I have never looked for it."

"So you start with ideals and finish with . . . idols," and Gladys, sitting on the bowsprit, with the Moorish spangles glittering in the moonshine, looked up into his face. "A very bad exchange; people who make idols spend their life in keeping them in repair."

"You have not answered me, Miss Ferguson."

"They will say I arranged this party with an object," said Gladys, very gravely. "Oh, I am not trifling in the least," she added quickly, interpreting his eyes.

"That is a trifle," Jack interrupted somewhat impetuously.

"But I do not love you, Mr. Temple." And Gladys opened her eyes wide with a look of remonstrance, and spread her hands with a gesture of helplessness.

"If you don't, there 's no use trying," said Jack. His reply was half a question, for in spite of Gladys' rather discouraging remark he felt no inclination to abandon the subject.

"You scorn to appeal to ethical motives!" said Gladys a little mockingly; yet he did not think she was teasing him.

"I am afraid there are none to appeal to in this case, Miss Ferguson. Love them that hate you is the commandment."

"Oh, we surpass the commandment; we can even love them we hate," and Gladys shut her small lips tightly. "I have not sought this interview, have I, Mr. Temple?" she exclaimed suddenly.

"God forbid!" said Jack, energetically.

"But I 'm quite capable of it. What was it I heard a very . . . oh, a *very* dear friend of mine saying to you, — the one you took to dinner to-night" . . .

What this very dear friend had said was that Rowan, who had just sailed for Europe, in escaping from Gladys' net had apparently torn it badly.

"I told you I did n't care what they say," replied Jack.

"Not even if it were true?"

"Never — when I succeed," said Jack honestly.

She looked up. It was impossible to tell which had the upper hand, — the sadness or the smile. Perhaps Gladys was responsible for neither, and had inherited them with her eyes and mouth;

for how could one have two such moods at the same time?

"How foolish would you dare to be?" she said, unfastening a rose from the cluster at her throat, and dropping one of its leaves over the rail. "Enough to risk success on its turning twice? Quick" . . .

"Yes," said Jack, watching its fall.

"Three times," laughed Gladys as it touched the water.

"Try once more, Miss Ferguson."

"It is n't necessary," said Gladys, giving him the rose. "Come, you and I are neglecting our guests."

"Aunt Isabel," said Gladys that evening with a firmness which announced an important decision, "I am going to marry" —

"To be married!"

"No," said Gladys, "to marry."

The reasons which had prevented Aunt Isabel from entering what she called "the double state" had not controlled her aspirations for Gladys. It was difficult, however, to urge her wishes without admitting that she served as a warning rather than as an example. But the old lady knew all the symptoms of love's malady, though, as she said, she had never died of it, and intimated in a somewhat excited manner, as she adjusted her cap, that, while the announcement was

sudden, she was much pleased and had foreseen it for some time.

"Foreseen what?" said Gladys, tranquilly. Aunt Isabel's eyes shone with conscious superiority. "I think it was quite unpremeditated on Mr. Temple's part, and I am sure it was on mine."

"Gladys Ferguson," exclaimed Aunt Isabel, grasping the situation with her customary rapidity, "you are doing what you know you will regret. You do not consult my judgment,— let that pass; but you might consult your own conscience, not to say heart."

"Don't let us be personal," said Gladys, softly but firmly.

"Personal!"

"Mr. Temple knows what people say," interrupted Gladys, "and is quite as indifferent as I am."

"Which you are *not*," interjected her aunt, wrathfully.

"Furthermore, I told him I did not love him."

"The more fool he" —

"If everybody's a fool, you must n't expect so much wisdom," pursued Gladys. "Mr. Temple has consulted the auguries, as Cæsar did: don't you remember the story, how the bird had no heart? But Cæsar persisted, and Mr. Temple — follows his example."

Aunt Isabel easily lost her temper with Gladys; but there were farther limits to her irascibility, beyond which she passed into a state of scorn whose silence was annihilating.

"You have no objection to Mr. Temple, have you?" asked Gladys, following her aunt with her eyes as she moved about the room, grimly making her preparations for the night. Aunt Isabel's only reply was an expressive pull at the bell which summoned Ellen. Gladys sighed, and gathered up the long pins which had secured her wrappings, and which during the conversation had been accumulating in her lap.

"If your suppositions were correct, Aunt Isabel," she said, at the door, "you ought to be more pitiful than angry. It 's too bad to have a relapse when one is convalescent."

It was very aggravating to Aunt Isabel to know that Gladys at that very instant was exceedingly bewitching, standing in the doorway, with a wound in her heart and a half-repentant, half-willful smile on her lips. But she continued her preparations with a scornful indifference so far superior to frowns or anger that Gladys closed the door.

Jack had sought this interview as little as Gladys, though he knew when he first saw her that evening what he was going to do. But, musing over his cigar that night, he was not in the least surprised at what had happened.

How many such moments in life, when, unconscious of any single final decision, we know, nevertheless, that it has been made! The very currents which solicited us when choice was possible act at last mechanically, the inertia of our own indecision becomes a momentum, and we realize that we are passing the edge of the rapid into the dead water which hugs the shore, or the tide which overhangs the fall.

The anxiety and apprehension of Jack's ride to Ashurst were not diminished by the fact that the consequences of this rash act, so unique in his life, had belied all the business principles which in other respects governed it. For he had been unreservedly happy with Gladys. Of this there was no doubt; men may be content with only the reputation for wisdom, but never with the reputation for being happy. The better he knew her, the more he respected her. For every fault she had some balancing virtue. She was fond of society, but was mistress of a house whose affairs went on with the order and regularity of clockwork. He had a great admiration for this delicate, sensitive spring, quivering at the slightest touch, yet driving the wheels with an apparently inexhaustible supply of nervous energy. Gladys enjoyed trifles and trifling, but on all important issues was sincerity and truthfulness itself. He never felt the desire to con-

trol her, because the need out of which desire arises was absolutely lacking. In his ideal there had been an attractive element of weakness and dependence, due perhaps to his strong physique and warm heart; he had always secretly longed to protect and shelter something, and while Gladys at times threw herself upon his judgment, and gave him her hand in difficult or giddy places in a way which gratified this longing beyond expectation, she could also walk alone with an independence which raised his love from sentimentality to worship. He had never been more free than since his marriage. Doubtless money had permitted Gladys to save him from some of the worries incidental to his new duties, yet he had the feeling that were they living in a garret, matters would go on in about the same orderly manner. Others had also been won by this balance of Gladys' qualities. She disarmed envy by kindness; originality took all the sting out of her eccentricities, and brilliancy all the poison out of her malice. She had told him with a fearlessness and a frankness that failed to inspire the least alarm that her "very dear friend" was entirely right, and that she had loved her cousin as much as, under the circumstances, her pride would allow; she added that she had no further belief in love, and straightway fulfilled all love's offices in so charming a manner that,

while Jack believed her confession, he had no faith in her creed. She had told him so clearly of Rowan's passive rôle in what she called her stage romance that the only feeling aroused by her cousin's return had been a kindly pity for a man who had lost his opportunity.

Nevertheless, a vague uneasiness increased the anxiety caused by the brief, imperative dispatch in his pocket. He remembered now all that was unusual in Gladys' manner the day before; and if this uneasiness took no definite form in his thoughts, it was because he broke away from their grasp whenever it threatened to do so.

James was at the horse's head as the train drew into the station. He touched his hat, scrutinizing obliquely his master's face, as the latter entered the carriage. Jack asked no questions; since James had nothing to volunteer, he did not dare to. From the carriage he went straight to his wife's chamber. Ellen rose from the bedside as he came in; but he motioned to her to remain. If she feared to be questioned, her fear was groundless; for, after standing a moment beside the bed, he stooped over Gladys' unconscious form, kissed the unresponsive hand, and left the room.

Ellen was suffering under the weight of a responsibility to which she was not accustomed.

After her confession to the doctor that evening on the terrace, she felt relieved; but the pressure returned again at night in the long, still hours by Gladys' bedside. Face to face with that one great reality in whose presence every prop of deception falls away, her confidence in Rowan forsook her, and she waited impatiently for the gray light of morning and the first sound from Aunt Isabel's chamber to go and unbosom herself. She was ready to brave the storm of indignation which awaited her; but was astonished, on returning, as Rowan had bidden her, to find that she was not only forgiven but forgotten, and for a moment experienced the chagrin which follows the loss of an accidental and temporary importance. Ignorant of the real nature of the confidence which had been placed in her, she regretted its hasty betrayal when she relieved Margaret again at Gladys' bedside. In the bright morning sun the fears of the night had disappeared with its shadows. What would Gladys say when she recovered? for she loved Gladys. She accused herself of weakness, especially when she heard Jack's footsteps in the corridor and his knock at Aunt Isabel's door, divining the subject of the conversation which occupied the hour before she heard it open and close again. What had she done? Relieved from all anxiety on her own account, her solici-

tude for her mistress redoubled. To her relief and wonder, Jack did not enter Gladys' room again during the day, and the next morning, learning that he had returned in the night to the city, her indignation swelled to bounds which included all created male beings.

XXXVI.

Mabel was playing on the terrace when Jack came out of Aunt Isabel's chamber.

"Come," said he, "let 's go and throw stones in the river."

She sprang to his neck with an exclamation of delight, and, having relieved her little heart of its overflow of happiness, ran on ahead. "It 's astonishing how that child loves me," thought Jack. "Because you love her," said a voice. "That does not follow," replied another quickly. "Must be instinct," he said to himself, cutting short the dispute. He had passed a sleepless night, listening every half hour at Gladys' door, and falling asleep towards morning on the lounge. When he awoke the sun was shining brightly. He lay for a moment endeavoring to recall a dream, then rose and threw open the window. Rowan was crossing the lawn. He remembered now; he had dreamed

that he was asleep on the deck of the Vixen, and that voices in the cabin below were continually waking him, — Rowan's and Aunt Isabel's. He dressed himself hurriedly and went down to the latter's room. Scarcely recovered from the shock of Ellen's confession and her interview with Rowan, Aunt Isabel was in no mood for deception even had she resolved upon it.

"Why not tell me the whole story?" said Jack quietly. "If she does n't love me, I love her."

"She does love you!" cried the old lady, vehemently, proceeding to relate all that had transpired, without reservation.

Jack listened in silence; where other men betrayed excitement, walked to and fro, or gesticulated, he stood still. But Mabel detected an unusual kindness in his manner as they strolled together towards the river, and a subserviency to her wishes of which she took full advantage.

"You wait a moment here," he said to her at Rowan's gate; "I 'll be back directly."

But Mabel, discovering Nestor curled up on the flat stone before the door, followed after, bent upon renewing their acquaintance. There was sufficient uncertainty in her devices for amusement to account for his uneasy eye, which watched her every movement with suspicion, and constrained a certain prudence on her part as

she proceeded, with an accompaniment of persuasive remarks, to ascertain exactly how far she could trespass with impunity on his dignity. The door was open, and Rowan looked up at the sound of her chatter to see Jack. Their eyes met, and read each other.

"Don't disturb yourself," said Jack, as Rowan rose. He was cleaning his gun, and had the barrel in his hand.

"Sit down," said Rowan, not knowing what to say.

Jack seemed neither to hear nor see him, but stood looking at Gladys' unfinished picture in the corner.

"I should know that was Gladys if I only saw her foot," he said, slowly. "You don't believe in hair lines, do you? Neither do I. Hack it out with a sword, I say."

A moment of silence followed.

"You tie up a spirit like hers in a body," he said, turning suddenly, "and every heart-beat makes it quiver. Oh, I know, better than you do. You don't think I came here to talk, do you? All I want to say is this: if what has happened does n't kill her, the sight of you, or me either, will. When are you going away?"

"You might have spared yourself any anxiety on that score," replied Rowan.

"Well, I thought so; but some people are always standing on their rights, you know."

"Jack," exclaimed Rowan, stretching out his hand impulsively, as he moved towards the door.

Jack turned. "Do you remember Gordon," said he, "who shot Fay down on the Cape? Hammer caught on the gunwale getting into the boat; nobody to blame. If it had been intentional, they might have hanged him and evened things up a little." The slow, deliberate tones of his voice stirred Rowan's anger, but the haggard face confronting him checked its utterance. "When the market drops," pursued Jack, "somebody 's better off; but these damned random affairs, when everybody fails and nobody 's to blame — Come, little girl," he said to Mabel, going out the door.

Half way down to the gate he turned, went back, and shook Rowan's hand silently. "I had no right to marry her," he said to himself afterwards, rolling a large stone to the edge of the bank for Mabel. He was not aware of any excessive tenderness for Mabel, but to her nice discrimination of moods affecting her happiness, it was clear as sunlight. There was nothing she could ask to which he was not ready to assent, and he told her his longest and her favorite story on the terrace before bedtime.

After she had gone he walked out to the stables, where James was bedding the stalls for the night.

"What time does the last train go through?" he asked.

"At eleven, sir."

"Well, harness up to take me down."

He stopped a moment to speak to the horses, pawing and trembling with ears erect at the sound of his voice. Then he went in and passed up the stairs to Aunt Isabel's chamber.

"How is she?" he asked, closing the door behind him.

Aunt Isabel, who had been waiting for his coming all day, scanned his face narrowly as she shook her head. He walked to the window in silence. There was a flaw in the glass which blurred objects without, and he watched their distorted images with the curious interest of the irresponsible self in trifles when we are most in earnest.

"I 'm going back to-night," he said abruptly, with a certain dogged resolution.

"To-night!" It was breath, not words, that failed her.

"You can telegraph me if anything happens." There was a kind of satisfaction in being misunderstood, which led him to linger over these preliminaries.

"John!" exclaimed the old lady, rising from her seat.

"Well," he said, turning and looking at her,

"so we 've got to spell this all out, have we." She sank back again into her chair without taking her eyes from his face. "If I knew I could bring her back by going into that room and saying 'Gladys,' do you think I would go?"

"Yes, and forgive her."

"Forgive her!" Jack's face flushed. "What 's that got to do with it? You make her forgive herself; it 's easy enough to forgive other people. I would n't hesitate to ask her forgiveness if — if I had stabbed her through the heart, so far as getting it is concerned; but she 's stabbed herself. Forgive her!" he repeated, going to the window again; "we 've all driven her into a corner."

"You did n't expect to fool Gladys, did you?" he pursued, after an interval of silence. "It 's no use; we can't do it. She will read you like a book the first time she looks into your eyes. She would know by the sound of my heel on the stairs. I 've thought it all out, and I know I am right. Some people can talk things out of sight; wash the slate clean with a few tears, and begin all over again. Do you think Gladys is one of that kind? You know as well as I do; she 's got too much conscience. You can't reason with it; it 's made for self-torture. I say I would n't wake her because I should n't dare to."

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He went to the door softly, as if he were indeed afraid of waking her, but came back to take Aunt Isabel's hand. "Don't you be afraid she will misjudge me; she and I have always understood each other. She 'll know when she wants me — if she ever does. There 's Mabel, you know. You 've got a hard time before you." He pressed the trembling fingers. "But we 're not thinking of ourselves. Write me a line every day, and telegraph me if . . . either way" . . .

As he went out he paused a moment at Gladys' door, then descended the stairs to the library, where he took from his desk a bundle of papers. As he opened his cigar-drawer a pair of old gloves met his eye. They were torn and soiled; he remembered to have seen Gladys wearing them in the garden. He took them up mechanically; notwithstanding the cigars, there was still that nameless perfume in them which belonged to all her things, though she detested perfumes, and never used them. He thrust them into his pocket, closed the drawer, and went out on the terrace. The autumn night air was fresh and bracing, and a burden seemed lifted from his shoulders.

"Rather late for you to be going this way, Mr. Temple," said the conductor, passing through the car where Jack, wrapped in his thick coat,

sat alone smoking. Jack nodded. His hand was in his pocket, closed about an old glove.

XXXVII.

"There, my child, be quiet, and rest," the voice had said.

She was conscious of something, something of supreme importance behind the drowsy sense of indifference which weighed down every effort. Something momentous had transpired, some great organic change, such as warns the soul when its tenancy is about to expire, and, with shuddering wings, it waits for flight. A vague remembrance — she exerted all her will to recall it — but little by little a langour slowly overpowered her; the soothing tones of that voice, repeating themselves in endless murmurs, at last sunk to an inaudible whisper, and she ceased to struggle.

Suddenly Gladys opened her eyes.

Motionless, they rested on the lace hangings falling from the white rosette of satin over the bed. The heavy curtain outside had been drawn over them, and the light from the window glimmered feebly through its mesh of threads. There were its woven figures she knew so well, — birds in a screen of vines and leaves. Some one had

drawn the curtain closer, so as to intercept the light, and Gladys wondered. Beyond, out of sight, the clock ticked steadily; it must be on her desk, by the window; who had moved it from its accustomed place? She heard the familiar click of the wheels which preceded the striking of the hour, — one, two . . . five. She must have fallen asleep before dinner. No! she suddenly recognized that she had on her night-dress. How hot it was! She essayed to move her limbs to feel the cooling touch of the sheets, but they were heavy as lead, — They must be asleep!

She had not taken her eyes from the figures on the curtain upon which they had first opened. She felt no inclination to turn them elsewhere, and for a long time lay immobile, watching the bird looking at her from its screen of embroidered leaves. A slight noise in the room caused her at last to turn her head; a woman, whose back was towards her, sat sewing in her easy chair. It was neither Ellen, nor Margaret, nor Aunt Isabel. Her hair was cut short, escaping in curls from the ruffle of a white cap, which contrasted strangely with the thick, red neck above the broad shoulders. Gladys could not see her face, but an air of comfort and somnolence, like that of a huge cat curled up before the fire, pervaded this figure. Something

in its placidity frightened her. Who was it occupying her chair, sitting in her room? She resolved to shut her eyes and pretend she was asleep. As she closed them, the drowsy feeling of lassitude and indifference stole over her again, like a mist. Sounds, as of organs and distant litanies rose and fell rhythmically, and then vanished like a wreath of smoke in the wind. Her eyes were wide open again; there were the birds among the leaves, and the figure in the chair as before. Suddenly this figure moved, and Gladys closed her eyes quickly, as if caught in a fault. A soft but heavy step approached the bed, and she felt a hand on hers. Then the steps withdrew, there was a tinkle of glasses on the dressing-table, and the closing of a door. She opened her eyes eagerly now, and made an effort to raise herself on her elbow, falling back with the surprise of one who for the first time finds his orders disobeyed. She looked at her hand, lying outside the sheet; the fingers were long and thin, but seemed of enormous size, and heavy. She did not try to account for this, — she felt inclined to laugh, — when, far away, the whistle of a train came echoing down the valley. A confused rush of thought swept over her, a desperate sense of being late. Mabel was not ready. The cars were drawing out from the station as they came

in sight of them round the last curve of the road. Jack had sailed. She could see the leaning sail of the Vixen far down the bay, and then, like a lightning flash, all this blur of thought cleared away, and the truth burst upon her with a vividness more real than experience itself.

XXXVIII.

Aunt Isabel received the summons to Gladys' chamber as a felon hears the key in the door when the fatal hour is come. How many times she had bent over the bed, holding her very breath lest those blue eyes should open; for she knew what questionings were there, and what a world of tragic sadness was hidden behind the sorrowful droop of their lids. And now she gathered up her cards and went to the glass. What a face! She endeavored to smile, to rehearse her part, to recall the words she had selected for this very hour . . . "God help me, what can I say!" she murmured.

She opened the door softly, stealing to the bedside under cover of the curtain, — all her plans had forsaken her, — and hid her face in Gladys' neck.

"She knows," thought Gladys, lying passive, her eyes fixed on the white rosette above.

"Sh . . . sh . . . Laddie," whispered the old lady, calling her by an almost forgotten name of babyhood. "Sh," she repeated, "you will be better soon. Do not talk; let me talk; it has been a hard fight; let us thank God it is no worse," and she patted the shoulder where her face lay. The hardest part was over now, the plunge at all events was taken, and she raised her head and kissed the pale lips.

"Worse than what?" said Gladys.

"Hush, dear," said Aunt Isabel, soothingly, "try to be quiet. To-morrow you will be stronger. The doctor has left me the most positive orders."

"Stay here — I am strong."

The red face of the nurse appeared at the bedside, reinforcing Aunt Isabel's last remark. "Come, now, be reasonable, that 's a dear; to-morrow at this time you 'll be bright as a cricket."

The strong, cheery voice, with its intrusive familiarity, jarred upon Gladys.

"Send her away," she whispered, pressing Aunt Isabel's hand.

The latter hesitated, then made a sign to the nurse, who withdrew, shaking her head. "I will stay five minutes by the clock," she said, "if you will promise me" —

Gladys closed her eyes in acquiescence, then fixed them upon her with a steady gaze of interrogation. Was Jack right — was it better to hold nothing back?

"How came I here?"

"Sh! remember your promise; you were sick that night, out of your head . . . I know, I know . . . I will keep nothing from you; but you must look at things as they are. I have been mad myself . . . what does it matter — wine goes to every head." She could not get back to the facts while those eyes were upon her, and wandered off into the excuses she had devised. "Do you remember the donkeys at Lucca, with their paniers? We are all nothing but donkeys — a feather's weight in excess on either side and we lose our balance. Do you think we are all harpies waiting to pounce upon you?" and she took the unresisting hands in hers. "Don't look at me in that way, Gladys; I will tell you everything — dear me! If you only knew how many times I have fallen down to get up again."

"He brought me?"

"Yes, dear, what else could he do? They are all going away — we shall have peace again, a quiet time, you and I. Ellen undressed you, here — she 's a good girl — and thought to keep it all from me . . . just as if" — And Aunt

Isabel's fingers smoothed back gently the unbrushed hair.

"She knows, too," thought Gladys. "Keep back what?" she said.

"Now listen," — and Aunt Isabel assumed an air of authority, — "between love and anxiety I shall lose my patience. Give yourself into our hands; the past is gone and cannot be helped; let it be as bad as you please — it is *not* so — all the torture is in your own heart — forget it. . . . No, dear, you cannot . . . now; but think of us — see me here with my arms around you — and Jack — not now, but by-and-by; you know each other. What are we good for if not to lean on? Open your heart to us — cry — but creep back into the sun. Do you know why I am . . . what I am? because once I hardened my heart, instead of" — Her voice trembled. "There, I am going, you shall rest; and we shall wait for you to call us back; you have no right to keep us out of your arms. Come, dear, begin now; give me a kiss," and as the old lady rose she leaned over Gladys' fixed eyes and laid her cheek against the pale lips. "I shall come back soon, and we will have a talk as we used to when I put Laddie to bed."

"If he were only here now!" she said to herself as she went to her room, "men never do understand," and she resolved to telegraph for Jack at once.

The nurse, reëntering the room, approached the bed softly and listened for a moment — Gladys' face was turned to the wall. "She is asleep," she thought, and drawing the curtain closer to shut out the light of the low sun, she stole on tip-toe from the chamber to take her afternoon cup of fresh air.

. . . . . .

"The past is gone and cannot be helped." The words repeated themselves again and again in Gladys' ears. The web was spun, the master-thread had escaped from her hand. How it had slipped, like sand, through her fingers. "Sick — mad . . . wine goes to every head," Aunt Isabel had said. Oh, the thief that had stolen in with the wine! Mad or weak, fated or uncompelled, it mattered not now; the web was spun.

Jack was there, waiting for her to call. How could she call, she who was dead? A terrible, oppressive weight lay across her heart, — the weight of her dead self. She could see it lying there, shrouded and still. Jack was kind — so kind! Nothing could change him for her. "You cannot change for him," somebody seemed to whisper to her; and she repeated the words over and over, holding fast to them, as to a strong hand. If she could but struggle from under that dead self and creep back to the sun! Surely,

she loved Jack. "But love, without self-respect," said another voice; "is love a thing to run into every mould of circumstance and mood; to change as we change?" She turned her face wearily to the wall. She could not reason. Now it seemed as if she had played with mighty forces; now that they had played with her. Self-respect! Oh, the thief that had stolen in with the wine! She could track him now through all the vacillating shadows of indecision, when reason counseled and waited, and passion counseled and impelled, — more persuasive than reason; for what passion counsels it can do. Absorbed and bewildered, she listened to these voices questioning and answering each other. "Ellen, Aunt Isabel, Jack, Rowan, and, if Rowan, then Seraphine," said one, "they look into your heart; it is bare, and they know." "And I, also," she said to herself, closing her eyes. Suddenly the words Schonberg had been reading came back to her. No, she did not remember them. Some one spoke them distinctly in her ear: —

> "Why, if the Soul can fling the Dust aside,
> And naked on the air of heaven ride," —

She opened her eyes. No one was there. Her hand lay outside the clothes; where were its rings?

> "And naked on the air of heaven ride," —

repeated the voice. The weight at her heart seemed to stir and tremble with life. What was life? the vapor, the dream, —

> "Were 't not a shame, were 't not a shame, for him
> In this clay carcase crippled to abide?"

said the voice again. She sat up in bed and looked about her. Her head was no longer heavy; strength ran in her veins. The chamber was still and dark, but she could see. As she touched the floor with her feet, she noticed they had put on her knitted slippers. She crossed the chamber quickly, opened the door, and glided down the stairs. Sounds from the rear of the house filled her with terror; a moment, and they would follow her, shackle the wings that trembled with the joy of flight; the door on the terrace closed behind her — safe! She was free! How fleet and light her feet were; the pack could not overtake her now. The trees envied her, shivering in all their leaves, crying free! free! The grasses under her feet whispered to each other: she is free! she is free! Far away, a star leaped out of the void with a flaming torch, crying free! and at the river brink, deep in the black flood, she saw it again for an instant, burning like a light from an open door.

She had the time to cry, to see Mabel's face, to struggle with those ponderous doors which closed upon her, to know it was vain; and the

heart which had throbbed with all He has made for its joy and its sorrow beat for a moment boisterously; then, like the ripple on the shore, grew fainter, fluttered, and was still.

XXXIX.

On the beach at Scheveningen, people were beginning to abandon their chairs reluctantly for dinner. From the promenade above, these chairs, whose high, curved backs concealed their occupants, presented a gregarious aspect, like so many hooded gossips, chatting together upon serious and important matters.

The sea was entering the low, hazy band on the sea-horizon, an opal mist, scarcely distinguishable from the sea itself, so closely did the shreds of vapor torn from its upper edge resemble the white curl of the waves below; one would say a strip of smooth water lying between the wind currents and trembling with unsteady scintillations. Sinking into this curtain, the sun seemed an enormous blur of light.

Down among the throng of idlers, busy only with each other, the beach appeared made expressly for their benefit; the sea to be a tamed monster, murmuring supplicatingly at their feet; and the sun to have chosen this hour, when the crowd was greatest, to make his exit with all possible magnificence. But beyond, on the deserted

shore, nature regained her majesty; and on passing the last chair of this throng, its importance was gradually swallowed up in the silence of the sea and the dune stretching into the haze where all boundaries were lost in mystery.

"Madelon," said Elize, "call Alexis; it is time to go in."

In the deep chair, behind the parasol secured in front, scarcely anything was visible of Elize but a pair of small feet and a lap in which were the children's stockings. This parasol had been arranged so as to form a loophole for observation, through which she could watch the children, and survey also the stream of promenaders passing between her and the advancing tide. Near by was a group which especially interested her. Its principal personage, a young mother like herself, was lying at full length in a large hollow, whose digging had cost the children infinite labor, her dress and feet buried in the sand. The elegance of this morning dress and the conduct of these children had furnished Elize the opportunity for some very natural comparisons, and materially retarded her progress in the book and letter lying on the little shelf in her chair.

Madelon, her dress looped back above her bare brown legs, ran out to her brother, who with a half dozen other boys was engaged in engineering operations, dykes, canals, and forti-

fications, successively abandoned to the incoming tide. Elize had not watched these insignificant operations without discovering indications of skill and daring which flattered her pride. Certainly of all the bare legs running over the sand or wading in the shallow water none were so strong or beautiful as those of Alexis, nor could she find any little girl so winsome or so appropriately dressed as Madelon. She was perfectly well aware, too, that her neighbor, though apparently oblivious of her presence, shared to some extent these opinions. In fact it was very evident to any one who watched Elize, as she brushed the sand from the children's feet and assisted them into their stockings and shoes, that her heart was full of sweet and innocent satisfaction.

Having gathered together the various impedimenta, — pails, shovels, and wraps, her book and writing materials, — she threaded her way among the chairs towards the steps leading up to the promenade before the hotels. At the top she waited for Madelon, whose short legs made two stairs of one. A few bathing wagons were still out in the white line of breakers; the fishing boats, like a flock of birds which gather on a tree, were approaching the anchorage near the lighthouse, whose shady beam, caught by the uneasy sea, was broken and lost in the shimmer of its lights and shadows.

"Come," said Elize, "try to hurry."

She had been endeavoring to write Seraphine, but amid the perpetual motion which everywhere solicited the eye, had scarcely finished the first page. A scrap of conversation behind her chair, a bathing wagon rumbling over the sand, the venders of fruit, milk, and flowers, above all the silken lustre of the sea, rendered all consecutive effort impossible. "I will simply tell her," she thought, waiting for Madelon, "that if I do not write, it is because I cannot; it is too beautiful."

On reaching the hotel, Elize found the letters which were the cause of her haste. One, from her husband, she laid aside, to have the pleasure of carrying it in her pocket till she could no longer restrain the desire to open it; the other, from Seraphine at Dinant, she read at once.

"He will not admit that he is not as well as usual, but it is now a month since he has walked farther than the great oak in the garden; this irritates him. Yesterday an eagle sailed in great circles above the Lesse for hours. 'Look at him,' said he; 'how he dallies with the wind.' It was the cry of a spirit for liberty."

Elize did not hesitate. It was not so much the desire to be with Schonberg in his last hours, but the courageous impulse of her heart to fly at once to his side, and battle with her frail hands against the enemy. She determined to

take the children with her, and passed the evening in preparations for the journey, finding time also to telegraph a certain staff-officer in Brussels — "that young man whom you call your husband," as Schonberg designated him — to meet them on their passage through the city. As he was unable to absent himself from his duties at that time, Elize only asked that he should accompany them as far as Namur, and in the happiness of this brief reunion almost forgot the object of her journey.

This happiness was sometimes so great as to reproach her. There had been a time — how far away it now appeared — when, notwithstanding the new horizons opened by the anticipation of returning to Dinant, the current of life seemed to have passed her by. Now all was changed, and she looked from Madelon and Alexis to her husband, after the first excitement of meeting was over, with the terror of the heart that is full, — the full cup whose contents tremble on the point of overflowing. How like his father Alexis was! The current had caught her up on its shining tide and thrown Seraphine aside.

"I wish you would love Seraphine more," said Elize, taking her husband's hand.

"But I love her very much," he replied.

Then Elize began to imagine herself in her sister's place. What would become of her if

she should lose Alexis? could common love console her? for as to that which existed between herself and Alexis there was nothing like it in the world. Once, after the terrible event which preceded their departure from Ashurst, it had seemed to her only natural that Seraphine should recoil from the very thought of marrying Rowan. What had he done? Nothing. But it was so terrible. Now, to the wife, this revulsion was almost incomprehensible; and, pressing the hand in hers to assure herself it was there, she thought, "Nothing could separate us." She remembered that hour when Rowan came, after Gladys had been found, — could she ever forget it? She could see Seraphine now, endeavoring to smile in order not to afflict him, — the smile of love, love not even wounded, but fettered, bewildered, imploring forbearance, a little time to cry alone, to accustom itself to reality.

She had promised Rowan to write him. Had he lost courage? He had only to wait. Was the fault hers? This thought often tortured her, — all the more because no one could impute blame to her. She had almost resolved, a month after their return to Dinant, to summon him of her own accord. Why had she delayed? Seraphine would have forgiven her; for later, when joy gave her courage, and she confessed her own happiness, she had spoken of Rowan, and Sera-

phine had kissed her and written that very day. The memory of their walk together to Dinant with that letter brought a little sob of repining to her throat. Oh, if she had but followed the first impulse of her heart, before it was too late! For when her hand, trembling with eagerness which could not wait, pushed that letter through the narrow grating, there was no one to claim it but the dead man lying with his face to the stars on the field of Manassas.

What had given her the hand she held, her children? thought Elize. If she had not dropped her bracelet in the Allée of the park at Brussels, she and Alexis would never have seen each other. Think of it! — a wide world of happiness, and she might have passed its narrow door without entering. What had she done to deserve it? What had Seraphine done that a bullet fired at random in a swamp four thousand miles away should find her heart, just daring to beat again?

"You have not said a word this last half hour," said Alexis, as the train approached Namur. "What are you thinking of?"

"Of you," replied Elize.

After leaving Namur there was little opportunity for further reflection. The children began to feel already the relaxation of Elize's authority, — an authority which at Walzins disappeared altogether in the gentle acquiescence of

Seraphine. As for Schonberg, at the most he was only their equal.

"I see it, mamma, mamma!" cried Alexis; "it is Dinant."

But there were yet two stations.

At last the citadel came in sight, above the white houses huddled together in its shadow at the foot of the rock, as if for protection.

"Do you think Aunt Seraphine will meet us, mamma?" asked Alexis, who had his pockets full of shells destined for her.

"I hope so," said Elize, endeavoring to look out the window and at the same time to put on the capote of Madelon, who danced at the mere sound of Seraphine's name. "How can I do anything while you dance so?" and Madelon, shutting fast her little fists, trembled like a horse that is being saddled.

The train had scarcely stopped before Madelon's curly head was buried in Seraphine's dress, and her little arms had fastened about her neck as she stooped to kiss Alexis.

"One would think you were the mother," said Elize, smiling with pleasure as she advanced.

But there was no doubt as to which was the mother. A radiance as from a light burning within illuminated the face of Elize; all there was complete, every promise realized. Seraphine was older, but the inexpressible charm of the

young girl lingered in every feature, the beauty of a promise yet unfulfilled; delayed, but not abandoned.

As Seraphine had written, Schonberg had not of late been able to go beyond the oak tree in the garden. Their long walks had become less and less frequent, and finally had ceased altogether. He had revisited the old chapel above Anseremne but once, soon after their return. Women were beating their clothes on the river stones, and workmen from the quarries which scarred the wooded hills were loading barges at the quay as he approached the village; but a new priest walked its street. Father Pierre had crossed himself for the last time, and was asleep. As Schonberg climbed the hill to the cemetery on its slope, he saw the wall had disappeared to make room for the silent company gathering there faster than in the village below. He passed through this added space, already thick with graves, — one newly made, covered with green branches and flowers, a screen of perishing beauty above the narrow door whither all footsteps lead and none return. Beyond, the rust and frost had done their work. Where was the little mound in the corner beside which he had knelt with Father Pierre? He could not find it. The old footpaths had disappeared, the shrubbery had grown bold with neglect, the trees

were larger and covered the entire spot with their thick shade. He turned bewildered to the old chapel; but there, too, all was changed. The doors of the main entrance were open, and the light entered freely through the renovated windows. A screen protected the carvings, newly restored, over the portal from the nesting birds. A new Christ hung above the altar; the black stalls were gone, and the eye wandered over the whitewashed walls without finding a spot on which to rest. But walking down the aisle his eye caught the rude outlines on the stone under his feet, — a man and a woman, side by side, with their hands folded over their breasts, — and at that instant all returned: the dust, the cobwebs, and the gloom. Here was the wooden frame of the gravedigger; the spade leaning against the pulpit rail. Here she had sprung with a cry to his arms. She was not dead, nor he an old man; only the pain and the waiting were old. But it was over now, and under his white moustache he repeated softly, "Noël, Noël," answering the sob on his breast.

A peasant woman came in, and, without heeding him, went to the altar and knelt, looking up in her prayers to the cross, — it was there the bier had stood, — and, listening to this old woman, whose remnant of life was hastening to consume itself, mumbling on her knees, he, too,

lifted his eyes to the figure above. What had he learned since those days, which he now saluted for the last time, but to cry with Noël, who had taken refuge there, Sanctuary! Sanctuary!

Having finished her prayers, the old woman rose, made the sign of the cross, and came down the aisle. Her hard, brown skin was creased with lines, but deep down beneath the apathy of her eyes a light shone, like a star in the river. The masks avail nothing, thought he, whether of fine contempt, of sodden care, or holy resignation. Tear them away, lay the ear to the breast, and listen; you will hear the beat of the immortal heart, the murmur of her hopes that still climb the celestial stairs, the tumult of her legions that life has not conquered, and that she will hurl in the face of Death even, when he comes.

From the chapel he returned to Anseremne, by the path through the birches. There were new buildings at the upper extremity of the village street, a new hotel, with a garden and graveled walks, through which he passed to the water's edge. Was it not here that she moored her boat? He could not tell. Only the river was the same; shimmering over the gravel beds, sleeping in the shadow of the cliffs, leaping with laughter under the black arch of the bridge.

This visit was his last. Often, in thought, he had revisited this spot, when its memory, like the murmur of a spring lost in the woods, had haunted his thirsty heart. And he experienced now that afterglow of happiness and pain which lingers in places sanctified once by their presence. But thither he returned no more; the springs were no longer here. And as if this visit had deprived him of somewhat that peopled his solitude, he clung more and more to the society of Seraphine.

For some time she had been concerned for his health, but such was his aversion to this subject that only after anxiety had grown to alarm did she ask his consent to call the physician from Dinant. He acquiesced readily, evidently to gratify her, submitting wearily to the examination, and indifferent to its result.

"Any one who takes the trouble to think how he happened to come into this world," he said to the doctor, who stumbled over his finding, "perceives that he cannot be a necessary being, and becomes reconciled to going out of it."

It was at this time Seraphine wrote to Elize. She knew the latter would come at once. How tell him without also telling him why? The night before Elize's arrival she went to his room. As he opened the door, his quill in his hand, the memory of another night rushed over her, when

she stood at his door in Ashurst, too full of happiness to keep its light from her eyes, and its confession from her lips.

He was embarrassed at seeing her, and she hesitated.

"I have some good news," she said, endeavoring to smile. "Elize is coming to-morrow."

"What, the little mother?" said he, with affected surprise.

"I disturb you?" she asked, sharing his embarrassment.

"As if that were possible," he replied, kissing her cheek.

"It is a pleasure to have Elize with us. She is so happy."

"Yes, the happy people are the best," said he; "they warm like the sun."

"But we are happy, too;" and she took his hand gently.

"Do you know," said he, after a moment of silence, "the coming of the first tooth of Alexis' gave me more happiness than all I have extracted from philosophy. It was only a drop, but it was pure."

Seraphine smiled, but the constraint she felt oppressed her. What she really wished to do was to throw her arms about his neck, to face the presence they feigned not to see, to say, "Do not leave me, or, if you go, take me also."

"Do not work any more to-night," she said aloud. "Let me read to you."

He cast an undecided look about the room, but, without giving him the time to reply, she went out hurriedly. They read together often at night, and when she returned he was in bed, behind the curtains of the alcove. The book she brought was not the one they were finishing. She had seen it on her table, beside her book of devotions, but when she came back it was the latter she held in her hand. Her fingers trembled as she opened it. What would he say? Then, without stopping to reflect, she began to read. In the pauses she listened; he did not move. The trouble disappeared from her voice as she read on, and, having finished, she went to the window to lower the shade. He seemed asleep.

"Seraphine," he said, from behind the curtain.

"Uncle," she whispered.

"I look often at night from my window. A cloud floats motionless on the deep blue. The hills, immovable, project their shadows over the plain." She saw them as she listened. "Nothing breaks the silence but the drip of the water on the wheel in the sluice, and the solitary cry of a night-bird. Yet all is motion. That steady star-beam is a quivering dart, and the

star a stormy host of atoms. It is they that bring the note of the bird, the image of the cloud. Hark! how they beat against the iron throat of the engine down the valley. The scream of its whistle is their song, and its strength their fiery dance. All we think and feel is but this world of movement, of mass and atom unable to control their own motions, and steeped in a sea so tremulously responsive that your faintest breath breaks on infinite shores. You do not dare to move?" She heard him sit up in bed. "You cannot help it! Nothing moves of itself since the dance began; nothing swerves but by collision. Others thou shalt drive, and they thee; but thyself never. I, myself, capable for an instant of unifying the past and the present, am but one of these atoms, swept on by its own inertia, and disappearing as it came, a portent and a wonder. Do you know what effect all this produces upon me? To create a faith so necessary in a Being so transcendent, that the inventions of men become puerilities. Come, little girl," said he, lying down again, "let us go to sleep."

. . . . . .

"He is much better to-day," said Seraphine, in answer to Elize's inquiries, as they rode back from the station. "I left him in the garden, and he told me to tell you he had put on his best coat."

"Does grandpapa love shells?" asked Alexis, who foresaw the possibility of enjoying the giving of his treasures a second time.

The carriage stopped before the great door, and the children, impatient, ran towards the garden.

"Alexis! Alexis!" cried Elize, "let Madelon go first."

He took Seraphine's hand, envying Madelon, who ran ahead down the walk, with such speed that Elize held her breath.

As the child turned the corner, she saw Schonberg in his chair. He had moved it into the sun, whose light fell upon his white head, bent forward on his breast. "He is asleep," thought Madelon, running over the grass. Softly, from behind, scarcely able to repress her glee, she advanced on tiptoe, and touched his arm. He did not move. She laid a round, dimpled hand in his, and looked up wonderingly into his face. She was not afraid. But, for the first time, he did not take her in his arms, nor kiss her cheek, nor smile. It was only by the absence of these tokens that the child knew Death.

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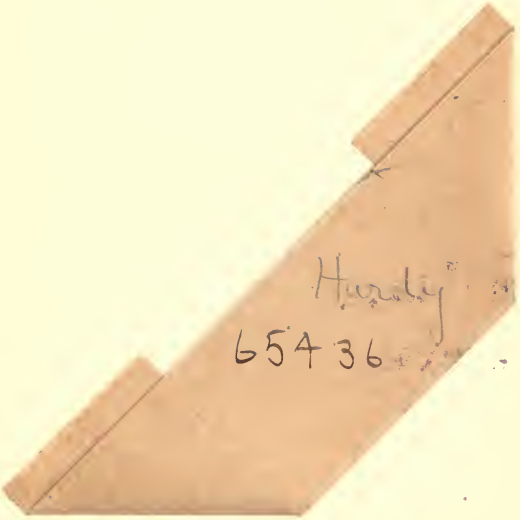
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